

THE LIVING FOREST

Arthur H. Heming

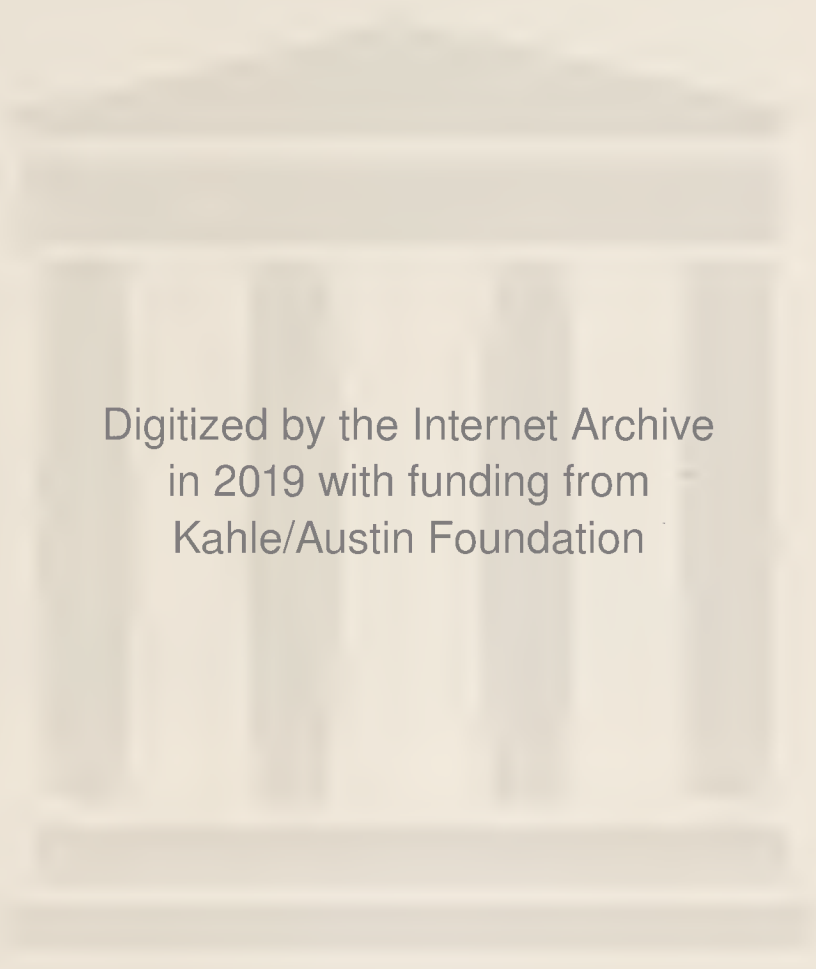
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THE LIVING FOREST



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Now down a steeper slope we flew like an express train through a canyon. Trees and rocks went flying by. Spray hit us like buckshot. Perpendicular walls of rock on either side made landing impossible. Ragged boulders appeared above the foam and threatened to sink us. Suddenly we struck a submerged rock that bellied up the bottom of our canoe, cracked her ribs, and ripped her open. Now we were sinking.—*See Chapter One.*

THE LIVING FOREST

BY
ARTHUR HEMING



ILLUSTRATED
BY
THE AUTHOR

S. B. GUNDY TORONTO
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FIRST EDITION

DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
MY BELOVED BROTHER
TOWNLEY

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CHAPTER I

ADVENTURE AND TRAGEDY

THERE was I, struggling for my life in the middle of the half-mile wide river. Now, even if I did reach shore, how could I live? How could I get food? My gun and ax were gone. Besides, no white man, Indian, or Eskimo lived in all that country, and I was more than seven hundred miles from the nearest railroad.

That afternoon—the 29th of July, 1891—I had come upon a caribou cow and her fawn while they were swimming the river, and being in need of meat had fired and wounded the calf. Paddling up to it, I tried to kill it with my ax. But the caribou mother, in a frantic effort to protect her young, lunged fiercely at me and, driving her chisel-like forehoofs through the paper-like craft, tore a gaping hole below the water line. Her violent blow nearly capsized the canoe, and when it recoiled I lost my balance and toppled head foremost into the river. Then down went the canoe, and with it went everything I owned in the world.

But though I swam with all my might, I couldn't reach shore. I knew I was going down, and down I went . . . once . . . twice . . . Then I

slowly rose again. I knew the third time would finish me. I was slowly sinking again when something seized me by the hair. The next thing I knew I was in a great canoe with a lot of strangers about me. Then everything faded away.

Later, when I came to, I was so weak and ill I couldn't raise my head. For a while I didn't care if I died. Then they gave me something that made me hot inside; I fell asleep. After that I felt better but still was half dazed. Then for a time everything seemed queer. Now there was another great canoe. Altogether there must have been twenty Indians and white men. There was also a boy in the first canoe. They called him Lincoln. Of all the strangers crowded about me there were two I cannot forget. One, a black-bearded, hairy man whom they called O'Brien. I don't know why, but I disliked him from the first. The other, an old half-breed with a strong, kindly face that smiled at me; they called him Bill Hill. Forget him? I'll remember him as long as I live.

I could now hear the roar of great rapids. The crews must have landed on that account. Later, when I raised my head to look over the gunwale, I saw three groups of men ashore. Bill Hill and nine Indians—I counted them—were sitting and talking together under the trees. Some distance away four white men—a tough-looking gang—were sitting on a log in the sand. Away from the others, but nearer the canoes, sat the boy Lincoln and a young white man that everybody called Mr. Perkins.

Both Lincoln and Perkins looked as though they were from some big city. They seemed lonely, too, and their

get-up appeared strangely out of place in the North Woods; for they were both fairly covered with guns and revolvers and bowie knives—like the people we nowadays see in the movies: all firearms and cutlery and cartridge belts. But when I looked at the different groups again I knew some of the others were missing. O'Brien, for instance, wasn't there.

Perkins took some snapshots with a camera and made some entries in a diary. Then I dozed off and slept until angry voices awoke me. O'Brien had returned, ax in hand. He was ordering Bill Hill to get aboard the canoe I was in, but the old half-breed refused. He explained, however, that it was his rule never to pilot a canoe through unknown rapids without first examining them and choosing the safest channel. Though the white man growled again, it had no effect upon the old half-breed. Finally, O'Brien, flourishing a big Colt revolver that he borrowed from Lincoln, ordered four of the Indians to get aboard. Sullenly they obeyed. Next Perkins and Lincoln entered the canoe of their own free will, without even being told. It was then that O'Brien, revolver in hand, again ordered Bill Hill to enter the bow. But still the old man refused.

"Get aboard or I'll fire!" snarled O'Brien as he raised the muzzle until it covered the old canoeman's face.

"I suppose I'll have to now, but remember, O'Brien—I may settle with you later," the old man scowled.

Getting aboard he picked up the seven-foot bow paddle. O'Brien next entered the stern, laid the revolver on a bale before him, and, taking up the steering paddle, growled:

"The first man to quit—gets a ball in the back."

Presently the paddles dipped and we were under way. Soon the shores changed. The rocky outcroppings grew larger, and more numerous too, and rising high and higher they at last formed two fortresses that stood one on either side of the stream. Yet they leaned so close together that they squeezed the river into a perfect fury. Between the upper end of a rocky island and the mainland on our right a big tree hung horizontally. Beneath the tree glided a gleaming, squirming lane of water that reminded me of a gigantic snake racing into its hole.

Suddenly the canoe turned to the right, and into that hole we swept with a rush. A moment later everyone ducked his head as we glided under the hanging tree. The canoe now began swerving this way and that—like a ship without a rudder. Hill looked back with anger. I, too, glanced behind. It wasn't what I saw, but what I didn't see that startled me. Our steersman had disappeared. Instantly Hill bellowed something in Indian. Quick as a flash an old man grabbed the spare steering paddle and worked with might and main.

Now down a steeper slope we flew like an express train through a canyon. Trees and rocks went flying by. Spray hit us like buckshot. Perpendicular walls of rock on either side made landing impossible. Ragged boulders appeared above the foam and threatened to sink us. Suddenly we struck a submerged rock that bellied up the bottom of our canoe, cracked her ribs, and ripped her open. Now we were sinking.

I looked ahead. Our end was nearer than I thought. A huge "cellar" now opened before us. It must have been caused by a big hole in the bottom of the river bed.

It suggested an enormous, irregular basin of greenish black glass. Although entirely composed of the river's water, it looked completely dry and empty. There wasn't even foam in it. It filled me with awe. But into it we had to go.

Over the rim went the bow. Then ribs cracked again as the stern upheaved. And down we went in a sickening dive. The tons of water already aboard now lunged forward and smashed against the hooded bow with the force of a battering ram. Thus in one great plunge we struck the cellar's bottom, and the force of the water aboard not only drove the wrecked canoe from under us, but ripped her clean in two.

Now we were struggling for our lives in that swiftly moving well; but while we were whirled along the bottom of that horrible hole we didn't sink any more than we would have sunk in sand, so hard was the water made by the force of the racing river. Then the current dragged us up and out and plunged us into a smothering swell. Some distance away I came to the surface, but only long enough to gasp half a breath; yet I saw a moccasined foot whirled above a crest of foam . . . I sank again. My lungs were going to burst. Then I was tossed into air.

At that moment I saw Lincoln whirled around in a whirlpool. The next instant he sank like a stone. Now a copper-colored hand shot up out of foam, clutched for something that wasn't there . . . and sank again. Something was floating near me. I strained toward it and was able to seize hold. It was a mass of dark brown hair. It was Lincoln's.

Although I could do no more than keep afloat I still

held his hair. Presently we were swept close to a big rock. I clutched for it but missed by an inch or two. Then the current rolled us into the boulder's back-water and we were swept up toward the rock again. I now seized hold, crawled up on top and there, with the exhausted Lincoln beside me, I rested upon the boulder.

I was so done out that I didn't know how long we had been there when I heard a rifle shot. A moment later came another report; then another and another, roaring and re-roaring above the noise of the river. Then came the sound of a man shouting. I looked around and saw old Bill Hill standing on the southern shore, about fifty feet from our boulder.

"Are you all right?" he called above the roar.

I shouted in reply. Then Lincoln raised his head and waved in answer. Bill shouted again:

"Don't worry. I'm goin' to make a line!"

Then he disappeared among the trees. Later he returned, carrying a bundle of thin poles on his shoulder and a coil of line that hung from his hand. Turning up stream he halted on reaching a rocky point that caused the current to sheer off shore. Then, fastening one end of the line to a small stone, he tied the other end to one end of a boom he had made from the poles, suggestive of a wooden chain. Casting the boom, one pole at a time, into the current, he threw the stone as far out over the water as the line would allow, and when the line grew taut, it jerked the stone down into the river. The current, striking against the anchored line, forced the boom out into the stream much farther than it otherwise would have gone. As the boom floated

down, it dragged its anchor, and thus the force of the current outstretched the wooden chain against our boulder, and we seized it.

The boom was made of dry spruce poles tied end to end—though about six inches apart—with thongs of ~~gum~~ ^{green} willow bark. The line was made of the same material.

“Take hold th’ end pole,” Bill called, “but only one at a time. An’ hang on tight.”

Lincoln seized hold and, stepping into foam, away he was whirled in a quarter circle through the racing torrent. Then Bill landed him about fifty yards below by carefully hauling him into an eddy. Again the wooden chain was cast adrift; once more I caught it, and, except for being tossed topsy-turvy and bruised against stone, I too was safely landed ashore. At least, I thought we were. But we had no sooner landed than Hill hustled us up into the shade of the trees, as though something might injure us. I couldn’t see or guess what it was.

“I wonder what’s happened to th’ other crew,” said Bill. Then he added: “Keep close behind me an’ don’t make any noise.”

He led us through tunnels of leafy shadow on our way up toward the head of the rapids, and we didn’t stop until we were looking down on the hanging tree. Presently we watched the old man work his way down among the bushes and rocks on the face of the cliff and stop to examine the tree. Why he took so long I didn’t know then. All we could see around the stump was a lot of fresh wooden chips. Evidently the tree had been chopped down with an ax. Yet, when Bill climbed back to us, his face was a study. He must have read

a startling story from the signs he found down there. But he didn't tell us anything then.

Now, more cautiously than ever, he led us up river, keeping well back among the trees as though someone might see us. Every little while he paused to listen. Once he whispered:

"We've got to know what's happened to th' other crew. Did you hear firin' a while ago?"

"Yes," I whispered, "I thought they were signaling."

"No, they weren't signalin'," he frowned. "We must be mighty careful now. Don't make a sound."

When we neared the little bay, where they landed to give O'Brien a chance to inspect the rapids, not a man was to be seen. And the freight canoe had disappeared. I couldn't make it out. But Bill didn't explain. Now he led us all round the bay, but of course well under cover of the trees so we couldn't be seen. Evidently he wanted to make sure no one was hiding in the surrounding woods.

Motioning us to keep back, he then stepped out into sunlight, and walking across the beach, he stopped suddenly and stooped. He was examining something in the sand. Even from where we stood we could see three big red splotches on the beach. He spent quite a time about the place, observing all the marks and signs, even following the three gutter-like impressions that led down to the water's edge. When he returned to us he was so agitated that he suddenly demanded:

"Now, boys, out with it. Gi' me th' facts."

And turning to me, he impatiently asked:

"What are you doin' down North? Never mind th' frills. Tell me straight."

He fairly took my breath away, but I managed to reply:

"When my father died, Uncle Rod sent an old Indian called the Giblets of a Bird to meet me at the railroad and take me to him."

"Who's your Uncle Rod?"

"Chief Trader Douglas of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Contentment."

"Good! Go on," exclaimed the old man.

"But on the way the Giblets of a Bird fell ill and died, and after that I had an awful time. I was starving and tried to kill a caribou calf, but its mother upset me into the river. That's when you pulled me out."

"What's your name an' where're you from?"

"Gordon Douglas, Toronto," I replied.

"What do you know about this O'Brien gang?"

"Nothing; never saw 'em before in my life."

"All right, my boy."

Turning to Lincoln he said:

"Now, Lincoln, tell me everything about your comin' down North. About your father an' Perkins an' th' mine. Everything. Remember—we're cornered. But we've got to move. An' I want th' facts. Every detail. Who was Perkins an' why'd he come down North?"

"Mr. Perkins was Father's secretary and——"

"Just a moment," old Bill interrupted. "I know a little, but not much. So tell me all, just as if I didn't know a thing. Then I'll get the facts I want. First, tell me 'bout your father."

"My father is Stephen Lee of New York. He's a millionaire. He owns several mines—one northeast of

here, near Golden Lake. They sent out word last winter that they wanted supplies taken in this summer and that there was a lot of gold ready to send out—Father said about a hundred thousand dollars' worth. And he sent his secretary, Perkins, to look after it. And I coaxed Dad to let me go, too. That's why I'm here."

"Did Perkins talk much about where he was goin' an' what he was goin' for?"

"Oh, yes, he talked all the time. He'd never taken such a trip before, and he talked about it on the train and everywhere, to everybody he met. If Dad had known he would have been wild, because Perkins even talked about it to the hotel bell hops and the cab-drivers, when we stayed over a day in Chicago to buy our guns. Though I reminded Perkins that Dad had said we no more needed firearms in Canada than we needed firearms in New York City. But on the train folks told Perkins he ought to arm up well if he was going into British America. That's why he bought so many guns in Chicago."

"Did he show his maps to anyone there?"

"Oh, yes. To a couple of mining men he met."

"Friends?"

"No. Strangers. But they treated us to a swell luncheon."

"What happened at Fort Redemption?"

"We were delayed about ten days. Because, though they had two six-fathom canoes, as Dad had ordered, they hadn't enough men to man them. The old trader had died, and the new one, not knowing anything about Dad's order, had sent all the canoemen to man a lot of boats to take supplies to other posts. When we arrived

the only canoemen we could hire were three old Indians and six mere boys. None of them were what they call 'white watermen.' The trader said we needed sixteen first-class canoemen, and four of them ought to be 'white watermen.'

"So we had to wait for the return of the boats. But nine or ten days later, along came O'Brien and five white men. They came from the South. They said they were on their way North, prospecting for gold. They said an American mining syndicate was backing them. They told Perkins over and over again how glad they were to meet some of their own folks from 'God's country.' And because they were so interested in Dad's mine, Perkins told them a lot about it. When they learned what was delaying us, they all volunteered to act as our canoemen.

"But when Perkins told the trader about their offer, the Hudson's Bay man was against it, because none of us knew anything about the newcomers. But Perkins went up in the air and said that any men from 'God's country' were good enough for him, and he was going to hire them anyway.

"The trader then warned Perkins about letting O'Brien and his men take their guns along. He said the Hudson's Bay Company never stood for that sort of nonsense. It was against the rules for any of their voyageurs or packeteers to carry firearms. So Perkins agreed, providing the trader would tell O'Brien that. It made O'Brien mad. But when the trader said he wouldn't let Perkins have the canoes unless they agreed to leave their guns at the Post, O'Brien and his men gave in.

"That gave us fifteen men for the two canoes. We were still one man short. Then, just as we were ready to start, you arrived at the Post. And when the trader told Perkins you were one of the best white watermen in the country, he decided to have you at any cost. Then you came along as bowsman for our canoe."

"Do you know th' way to th' mine?" old Hill asked.

"No. I've never been there," Lincoln replied.

"I know you haven't. But you saw Perkins's map, didn't you?"

"Yes. Several times."

"Could you draw a map of th' route from memory?"

"No. It was too complicated. There was too much to remember. Father had drawn in portages and lakes and rivers and written a lot of notes all over the printed map, because the lakes and streams on the way to the mine, northeast of here, weren't shown in print."

"Did th' route lay in a fairly straight direction?"

"No. It zigzagged a lot both east and west as well as north. Didn't you see the map?" Lincoln asked.

"No, my boy. I wanted to, an' asked Perkins several times, but he always said O'Brien had it. An' when I asked O'Brien he pretended he couldn't find it. If I'd known I was tyin' up with such a bunch of fools an' rogues I'd never 'ave consented to come."

"But how did O'Brien get control of the whole outfit?" I asked.

"By boastin' and flatterin'," Bill replied. "An' he poured it over Perkins by th' bucket full. Then a few days later Perkins put th' devil in charge. But Perkins certainly wasn't a judge of men. He's dead now, however, so I won't say any more. But he's only one of

eight that were murdered to-day. Five were drowned when our canoe was wrecked. An' three were shot out there," said the old man, pointing to the red splotches on the sand.

"Murdered? What for?" asked Lincoln in dismay.

"To make it easier for O'Brien an' his Chicago gang to get th' gold. They're goin' to rob th' mine. They're headin' for th' mine now. They've forced th' other two Indians to help man th' freight canoe. They've got all th' supplies an' Perkins's rifle an' shotgun an' ammunition, as well as your revolver. They don't know we're alive. They think we're dead."

"But they've lost O'Brien!" I exclaimed.

"Not for a moment. O'Brien's not dead. He wasn't drowned. He leaped out on th' hangin' tree. That's what he chopped it down for. To save himself when he headed us all for death. Yes, he saved himself. Th' tracks an' marks at th' tree proved that. Then he hustled back here. That's when th' firin' began. That's when three of th' other five Indians were killed. But he saved two because he needed eight to man th' big canoe. He even has th' map your father made. I saw O'Brien put it in th' freight canoe before he shot us into th' rapids. Yes, they're headin' for the mine, and they'll get th' gold, as sure as we're alive. But how long we'll be alive I don't know. An' yet it all depends on ourselves."

"How do you mean?" Lincoln asked.

"It all depends on our woodsmanship. We're in a country where no natives live. We've lost everything save my knife. It's as though we were thrown back fifteen or twenty thousand years in th' history of th'

world—except for th' fact that we've got a steel-bladed knife. Now we'll have to depend on nature to supply our needs. Civilization means mighty little to us now. We'll have to face everything without its aid."

"Like Robinson Crusoe?" I asked.

"No, not for a moment like Robinson Crusoe. But I wish to God we were, for Robinson Crusoe had a ship-load of supplies. Food an' clothin' an' guns an' everything he needed to support himself in comfort. While we have nothin' in th' world—except my knife."

"Then a few more days and that's the end of us," I sighed.

"But while there's life there's hope, my boy. An' as long as we have th' use of our brains an' hands we ought to try to live. All our ancestors did, an' it's up to us to do th' same. So from now on, even though you are boys, you must play your parts like men. One man an' two boys won't stand much of a chance; but three men can put up a creditable fight for life."

"Then tell the other two men what to do," said Lincoln.

"That's th' way to talk. Now I'm sure we'll have a chance. But I'm sorry we can't warn th' miners; for even though we knew th' way, we'd arrive too late. To look for th' mine without a map'd be like lookin' for a bullet in a forest—especially when th' only traffic to an' fro has been by river an' lake. Besides, it would prove a great loss of time. Th' wisest thing for us to do is to turn southward as soon as we can travel by canoe. Then we may be able to tell th' Mounted Police in time to stop th' murderers before they cross th' border. Though just as likely as not we may run across

th' brutes in a few more days; because they'll have to go out by way of this river. But we're wastin' time. We must be up an' doin'. From now on, day an' night, week in an' week out, for months to come, it will be nothin' but a continuous battle we'll have to fight. It's our only chance. But first I want to have a look at th' shore below th' rapids. Let's go. Some of our friends may've landed there."

CHAPTER II

THE MURDERERS RETURN

AS WE passed among the trees Bill was ever on the alert, looking this way and that, as if expecting attack; and whenever a chance offered he searched the shore line below in the hope of discovering surviving friends. But though we descended far beyond our landing place, we found no trace of human beings, either alive or dead. Already the sun was setting, and we were tired and hungry.

"Our only chance o' gettin' food to-night is to hunt for berries. An' we better not delay," remarked the old man.

On our search for fruit, Bill stopped beside a poplar tree, and removing a patch of bark, scraped the trunk with his knife until he had gathered a wad of moist, pulpy fibre. Handing it to me, he said:

"Chew it for a while, but don't swallow the pulp—just swallow the sap. It's a good thing to chew when starvin'. Don't forget it, boys; you may need it before you hit the railroad," he cautioned as he gave Lincoln some too.

It tasted like slippery elm.

"Another thing we must do before dark is to make our bed, because we mustn't make a fire to-night. For, if they saw our smoke, they'd know someone was alive an' they'd come back."

"Where do you think they are now?" Lincoln asked.

"The chances are they're in the woods beyond that point on th' other side o' the river. That's the best place to make a portage round these rapids, because round that point the river sweeps in a curve of more than half a circle. I believe they're portagin' over there now. But the work'll take hours. They've a lot to carry. Several tons I should judge."

"But if they're bent on robbing the mine, won't they cache it or leave it behind?" I asked.

"No. They'll have to take it along if they're goin' to pose as the crew o' the freight canoe. No doubt they'll tell 'em at the mine that they happened to get ahead o' the rest o' the party. We may escape 'em to-night, but to-morrow we're likely to have a call from the brutes."

While continuing our search for berries, the old hunter peeled off a sheet of birchbark, and folding in the two ends he fastened the folds with little wooden skewers, and thus made a rogan, or pail, for the carrying of fruit or water. In less than a quarter of an hour our search was rewarded when we came upon a patch of blueberry bushes that were weighted down with fruit. Some of the berries were as large as marbles, and their light-blue bloom on their blue-black skins was a sight to behold. So luscious were they that we pitched in, and before we grew tired of picking and eating our birchbark pail was full.

Wandering out upon a tree-crowned knoll that overlooked the river, and where, in the shadow of a canopy of spreading branches, we were screened from view, we rested a while.

"My boys, here's where we better spend the night. Here even a little breeze'll blow the flies away. I'll cut evergreen twigs an' you boys carry 'em here; then I'll make our bed."

When enough twigs were gathered, old Bill placed a log at the head of the bed; then he began laying along the log the first row of twigs, butts down and tips over the log. Back and forth he worked, one row upon another, shingle fashion, until he had laid enough for our bed. Later, when we lay down upon it, I found it so comfortable that I soon fell asleep. Hours later, the howling of wolves awoke me, and hearing Lincoln move I whispered so as not to awaken Bill. The old hunter, however, soon proved he wasn't asleep, for he and Lincoln began talking about wolves. Presently I began to doze. I don't know how long I must have slept when I was again awakened with an awful start.

"Lord! What was that?" I gasped.

"Don't know. Bill's gone!" Lincoln panted.

We listened. Now there was nothing to see but darkness and nothing to hear but silence; and nothing moved save the minutes that seemed hours. Then suddenly the silence was shattered with an awful hullabaloo that came from the depth of the wood: *whoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, whooo, whoo!* it sounded, like the deep bellowing of a bass-voiced man. Again and again it was repeated, sometimes ending in a mocking, bellowing laugh as of a drunken man; and then, while we shivered with fright, it rose into a piercing, blood-curdling scream. Spell-bound with awe and dumb with fear, we trembled as we listened. Later, when we once more made use of our tongues, all thought of sleep had left us for the night.

With heavily beating hearts we wondered what had become of Bill. Nevertheless, it was out of sound sleep that I was awakened when the old hunter called:

"Come, my boys. It's time we were gettin' breakfast. First thing you know the sun'll be up before you."

"Lordy! I'm glad you're back, Bill. We heard an awful noise while you were gone," I exclaimed.

"Like a bellowin' man?" he asked.

"Yes, a drunken man."

"Oh, that was a great horned owl. I'll show you one the first chance I get. But come, boys, let's be off. We better keep what berries we've got an' pick fresh ones for our breakfast."

"But, Bill, my tongue's so dry, I'd like to have a drink and a wash before I tackle food. Let's go down to the river," said Lincoln.

"It's risky, but there's a heavy mist on the river, so you boys better take advantage of it an' drink right away. But keep watch down stream, an' if you see any sign o' man, make a jump for the trees. I'll be over at the berry patch."

How refreshing the water felt. It made me long to take a swim. And when my wet face and arms began to cool on the down-river side, I noticed an easterly breeze was blowing the mist away. Presently I caught a glimpse of quite a stretch of the lower river. But what was that? I looked again. It was a six-fathom canoe. Then I saw a sudden puff of something. It looked like smoke. A moment later I heard the vicious crackle of a bullet in the air, then the smack of the bullet ricocheting from the water near us. A second later I

heard the report of a rifle. I leaped for the shelter of the trees. Racing toward the berry patch, we saw Bill running away from it and beckoning us to follow. Cutting the corner we made straight for him at our utmost speed, but strange to say he was running down river, not away from the big canoe, but actually toward it.

"Old fool—wrong direction!" I gasped.

"Yes—the old idiot!" puffed Lincoln.

But try with all our might we couldn't catch up to old Bill to stop him going the wrong way, and we didn't dare shout at him. For a few seconds we could hear bullets crackling through the air and then punking into tree trunks around where we disappeared from the river; presently, however, they began striking on the far side of that place, then farther up stream. Bill now slowed down, and when we caught up to him I breathlessly gasped:

"You ran—wrong way—we're nearer 'em now!"

"Wrong way? Use your brains. When dealin' with ordinary men use common sense. They thought we'd run away. I used common sense an' ran toward 'em. Now we're safe. They're shootin' where we would've been if we had run away from them. Listen! There, now! That bullet struck even farther up river. There goes another, even farther away than the last. They think we're still runnin' away from 'em. God gave us brains to use. An' if we use 'em, we'll have a chance o' livin'. Let's go down nearer the water. I want to see what they're goin' to do next. Don't make a sound. Keep well behind me, an' above all don't let 'em see you."

So cautiously and silently did the old hunter move toward the river that he made me think of a lynx. Presently he found a little peep-hole among the leaves, and we saw the big canoe heading swiftly toward where they had seen us washing. Securing another view, we saw the bandits land.

"Come. We mustn't be caught between them an' the river. We'll go up the hill."

"Can't they track us up there?" Link asked.

"I don't think so. They aren't woodsmen."

Presently we heard seven shots from a rifle.

"Notice? None of those bullets came this way. They think we're still runnin' in the other direction."

A little later we saw them paddling down stream, and soon they disappeared round the river's bend. There were eight men in the canoe.

"That's the last we'll see of 'em for a while. They're off now to rob the mine. An' may the Lord save the miners' lives," sighed old Bill. "Well, boys," he added, as if he wanted to dismiss the brutes from thought, "let's get something to eat."

Returning to the berry patch, we refreshed ourselves with blueberries, a fruit which one may eat as much of as he wishes without fear of illness. Later we sat in a patch of early morning sunshine and discussed our great problem of existence.

"Now, my boys, there's three things we must try to do. First, to live. Second, to travel. An' third, to notify the Police of what has happened. But whether we can do it, I don't know, for much depends on you boys. Even with the best o' luck, winter'll overtake us on the way. For what with havin' to hunt an' fish an'

build a canoe, the freeze-up'll catch us before we've gone halfway. Then there'll be the makin' o' winter clothin' an' toboggans an' snowshoes for our overland journey.

"Think of it—by river and lake we're over seven hundred miles from the nearest railroad, at Winnipeg. We're over four hundred miles from Fort Redemption. Even Fort Vengeance—the nearest Hudson's Bay Post between here an' the railroad—is over three hundred miles away, but it isn't on our line of river and lake travel. From here, the only possible way o' reachin' it is across country. An' that, at this season o' the year, is out of the question."

"But how about Fort Churchill or York Factory?" Lincoln asked.

"True, my boy, they're nearer still; but if we headed in that direction, it would mean bein' bottled up at either post for a year before you could catch an outgoin' vessel to England, and from there you would have to take passage to New York. So you see Hudson Bay is out o' the question. Our only way is to make a canoe, paddle back as far as we can before the freeze-up, then make winter clothin' an' toboggans an' snowshoes in the hope o' strikin' across country and reachin' Fort Vengeance. That's what we must do."

Then for an hour or so we sat in an easterly breeze and discussed other things, such as hunting and fishing, especially the way we would have to do it since we no longer had firearms or fishing tackle, and no implements to work with except old Bill's hunting knife.

"One o' the first things we must do is to set snares for rabbits. Then we ought to try for fish in the river."

"How will you manage that?" I asked.

"With a wooden spear," the old hunter replied. Then he asked, "Have you boys any matches?"

We felt all our pockets over and over again, but the rapids must have emptied them clean of everything. Even my handkerchief and pocket knife were gone. No, we hadn't a match between us.

"I ran out of 'em just before we struck the rapids an' intended askin' for more," remarked Bill, "but it doesn't matter—I can make fire without——" He stopped abruptly and began sniffing the air. Anxiously looking about, he exclaimed, "See the haze over the river. The air seems full of smoke."

Hurrying down to the beach we found the northern shore almost obscured from view, and the old woodsman growled:

"Those brutes have set the woods ablaze in the hope o' burnin' us alive!"

Looking toward the east we saw that the smoke was steadily increasing. In a flaming sky of many colors three mock suns were mounted on a great, far-reaching circle of rainbow size and beauty that formed a halo round the real sun. Now we could not only smell smoke, but we could actually taste it too, and the breathing of it affected our throats.

"We'll have to build a raft an' get across the river or we'll be trapped in a furnace. There's a pile o' driftwood up stream; we'll make it there. Quick, boys!" exclaimed the old woodsman.

Prying free a couple of spruce logs thicker than a man's thigh and twenty or more feet in length, Bill rolled them partly into water, adjusted them parallel

about five feet apart, crossed them at either end with poles as thick as a man's arm and bound the poles securely into place with thin, rope-like green willow switches. Adding more cross poles, about three feet apart, he also bound them into place; then, floating the structure, he shoved two other logs beneath the cross-bars and secured them with willow switches. Selecting four dry, thin spruces, he hacked them round their butts near the ground; then, by rocking them back and forth, aided by us, he broke them off. Three of them were about ten feet in length, while the fourth was about twenty feet long. They were to serve as poles for propelling the raft.

Smoking cinders and dead charcoal were now falling about us, and so dense was the smoke that we were always tasting it.

"It's mighty close now, but we ought to save our rogan o' berries. I'll be back in a jiffy."

Away the old man raced among the trees. Presently big pieces of blazing bark were flying overhead, and occasionally falling into the water with a hiss and a puff of steam. I had often wondered how forest fires could race ahead with such incredible speed, but now I stopped wondering when I saw how the wind would carry blazing embers a quarter, or perhaps a half a mile, in advance of the burning woods and start another fire. Every few minutes the raging flames seemed to jump another quarter of a mile or so. No wonder they overtook and headed off many a fleeing animal and burnt it to a crisp.

Presently a shower of blazing embers fell all about us, and we wondered if we would have to dip ourselves in

the river to save our clothes. Seeing and breathing now actually hurt, and my eyes were running water. Already we could hear the roaring and crackling of the great fire. A sudden loud splash not far away made us look along the shore. A bear had plumped into the river and was swimming across. Then we noticed three other animals farther away, but we boys couldn't make out what they were.

"A caribou cow an' two calves," said old Bill as he came up behind us.

Securing the rogan of berries to a crossbar, we shoved our raft into the river. Link and I were stationed toward the bow, each with a ten-foot pole at hand, while the old hunter took the stern with both his poles beside him. Shoving upon the crossbars before us, we waded toward midstream.

"We'll find shallow water most o' the way over," Bill explained, "but in channels it may be far over our heads. When nearin' such places gi'me warnin', then I'll push hard enough to carry the raft over. Otherwise the current may catch us an' sweep us down river into places too deep for polin'."

At first the deepest channels were only about ten to thirty feet wide, and it was in such places that the old woodsman made use of his twenty-foot pole; nevertheless, the river allowed us to do much wading. While we were busy with our poles, I saw the bear walk ashore, but the caribou cow and her calves had disappeared.

The river's course lay due east for some distance, then sweeping northward it passed out of sight. The wind was coming straight up river from the east. At first the fire was confined to the southern bank, but now it had

leaped the river and was racing along the northern shore. The smoke, however, was so dense that it was hard to make sure of anything.

Falling embers again made the river hiss around us, and a blazing piece of birchbark dropped on the raft behind me. A channel now caused us to use our ten-foot poles, but presently they became too short and Bill worked his twenty-footer; yet even it soon became useless, and the swift current carried us rapidly down river, straight toward the fire. Every once in a while the old hunter would try again with his twenty-foot pole, but he couldn't touch bottom. Meanwhile, the wind and the river seemed battling for the possession of our raft. But the river won.

"As there's fire on both sides now, there's nothin' for us to do but try an' keep in the middle; it's the safest place," Bill frowned.

The air had grown intensely hot, and so dense was the atmosphere that it was only on coming within less than a hundred yards of it that we could see fire. Drifting past a point that was a roaring mass of flame, we found the heat so great that it caused a strong uprising of air that carried smoking and blazing embers far out of sight overhead; the heat reminded me of the fire in a smelting furnace.

Whether drifting or poling, we occasionally had to pass through what might be called islands of smoke that seemed to be resting upon the river. It was then that we missed the steady east wind and almost smothered for the want of air. For though the fire's great heat had created a wind of its own, we derived no relief from it, as it did nothing but carry flames and smoke and

embers high in the air, and increase the roaring and the flaring of the flames.

Occasionally showers of glowing sparks would fall upon us and cling to our clothes, forcing us to lower ourselves into the river and submerge our heads. None but those who have seen, and heard, and smelt, and tasted, and felt a forest fire can realize what we went through. But before we had traversed a mile of it, Lincoln and I were thrilled at the number of animals we had seen either swimming in the river, or standing on sand bars or on little islands amid stream. First we saw three wolves going by in a bunch. Then two martens. Next a lynx and a moose calf swimming almost abreast; yet they appeared to pay no attention to each other. Later seven caribou, all swimming close together, crossed ahead of us and went by with such a rush that they created a wake that overran our raft.

Meanwhile, a whirling wind arose and made the blazing trees increase their roar. Later it settled down to a gusty blow that caught the dense clouds of smoke rising from either shore and swirling them together over the center of the river, tossed them into a great upheaval that resembled an active volcano. Now the only way to safety lay in following a tunnel of fairly clear air that we saw beneath the upwhirling smoke, and as good luck would have it, old Bill was now touching bottom with his longest pole; into that strange, flexible tunnel he guided our raft.

The tunnel-like space, however, did not always keep to the middle of the river, but at times passed so close to jutting tree-covered points that their swirling masses of flame almost set us on fire. Yet we had to go through

it, and the heat was so intense that one or another of us was always dipping himself in the river. Once the air channel carried us so close ashore that while rounding a point a great mass of flame, apparently detaching itself from the roaring, crackling trees, swept out over us and came so close that the gum on our logs actually ran. Such a great mass of flame sweeping so far from the trees was evidently caused by the combustion of gases that the black smoke contained. And though the smoke from certain sections of the burning woods was tarry black, the river valley was not obscured from light; on the contrary, it was at times strangely illuminated both by sunlight filtering through, and by the great flare of the blazing trees on either side of the river, and the roaring of which, strange to say, never seemed to be near us but always ahead of us or behind us.

Later, we came upon still another group of animals that had taken refuge on a big rocky bar. It was composed of two moose, a bear, a lynx, three wolves, and a wolverine; besides a number of smaller animals; and though we passed close to them, they merely looked our way in wonderment.

Poling on, we found the smoke gradually thinning, and presently we were overjoyed to discover several patches of sunlight on the blackened and smouldering shores. After a while a lucky turn in the river carried us out of the burning area, and we once more beheld green trees and breathed clear air. What a relief it was!

Afterward, in discussing the course of the river, the old hunter explained that we had first traveled east, then north, and then east again, until taking a final turn

that faced us south. Thus we had been swept round a great bend in the river that left the southern shore in the shape of a peninsula; and we were now straight east of where we had slept the night before. As we poled down the western shore, Bill cautioned:

"Watch for a place that looks like a dead campfire. That'll be where the brutes stopped for their second breakfast and where they set the woods ablaze in the hope o' burnin' us to death."

We couldn't help finding it, and we even saw where they had hurled burning brands to set the grass aflame, for some of the charred sticks still remained where they had fallen. Boarding the raft again, Bill remarked as we drifted and poled along:

"The first thing we must do is to camp in a good game section where we can get food while we build a canoe. Besides we ought to camp far enough away from this river to prevent our bein' attacked when the beasts return. Suitable birchbark'll be hard to find for the makin' of the canoe. Maybe we'll have to turn south to find bigger birch trees, an' if we do, that may mean a few days' hard travel overland. If the river's current keeps up, the place where O'Brien an' his gang will stop for dinner may be twenty miles or so from here. So, if we can get away from the river for a couple of days, we needn't worry much more."

After two or three hours drifting, we came to the mouth of a stream that apparently flowed from a group of western hills about five miles away.

"There's our chance. We'll tackle the creek, then climb the hills an' look around," the old man smiled.

It was a charming little stream about fifty feet wide,

and we had no trouble in poling up for a couple of miles to where a jam of driftwood made us leave our raft and continue on foot. It was then the old woodsman discovered a well-beaten game trail leading up the valley. The trail was about a foot wide and two inches deep and was worn free of moss and grass. As it wound among the trees and rocks it displayed the tracks of various beasts which the hunter named as caribou, wolf, and bear. Finally a little pond marked the rise of the little creek; and then for a mile or so we followed the game trail up a timbered slope until we suddenly saw sky between the trunks of the trees and a few moments later stood upon the brink of a precipice of solid granite that fell, in one sheer perpendicular drop of about a hundred and fifty feet, into a sparkling lake of remarkable beauty.

It was an enchanting sight. The lake appeared about seven to eight miles in length from north to south and about a half a mile in width. Near its center it was almost divided in two by a long slender point that jutted out from the western shore toward the rocky barrier upon which we stood, and which completely walled out the valley of the Eennu Sepe—the river of the Strange People, as the Indians called it. Now we knew that a safe camping ground lay over there among the trees on the western shore.

“There’s where we can build our canoe an’ get ready for your homeward journey,” the old woodsman mused.

Descending the cliff by way of the same game trail that now led down a gulch that scarred the precipice’s brink, we zigzagged back and forth from hollow to ledge or from crevice to slide; thus we descended, just



Later, we came upon still another group of animals—among them two moose—that had taken refuge on a rocky bar; and though we passed close to them, they merely looked our way in wonderment. Poling on, we found the smoke gradually thinning, and presently we were overjoyed to discover several patches of sunlight on the blackened and smouldering shores.

as the big game of that region had been doing for hundreds of years, to a little point that projected itself into the lake, where shallow rapids ran between it and the longer point that jutted out from the western shore, beyond which we wandered through the woods while the old man chose our camping ground.

It was cool and calm among the trees. Treading silently upon rich carpets of moss and soft mats of pine needles, and breathing deeply the delightful aroma of it all, we saw birds flitting among birch branches, squirrels playing among pine boughs, and butterflies resting on golden rugs that slanting sunbeams laid upon the soft, undulating floor of the forest. There we drank at a little spring and picked as many blueberries as we pleased, and the charm of it all made me forget the horror of yesterday and our morning's fight with fire.

CHAPTER III

OUR HIDING PLACE

HERE, for a time, we were going to stay, and here beside a little bay a hundred yards wide and almost entirely circled with trees we were going to camp in front of a big boulder at the base of which the old hunter had chosen to make our fire. It was a beautiful camping site, well up the slope and about fifty yards from a little spring. The big rock was flat faced and about twenty feet wide; it stood almost ten feet high, and formed an ideal support against which to lean the birchbark shelter the old woodsman intended building next day.

“Now, my boys, our huntin’ begins. We must get proper food to eat. I’m goin’ to try for a fish. I’ll be back in a second.”

Presently among the trees we heard the breaking of brittle wood. On Bill’s return he was carrying a small, dry spruce about six feet long and an inch and a half thick at its butt, and as he walked toward the lake, he cut off its dead twigs and sharpened the butt. Descending from the top of a high bank that overlooked a little weedy bay, Bill slowly waded out to a particular spot where he halted in water up to his bare knees. With his improvised spear poised above him he stood there minute after minute, without even a tremor, in readiness to strike should a fish swim near.

From the top of the bank it was easy for Lincoln and me to see into the water, but for a long time nothing happened. Then we noticed a school of minnows swimming near the old man's legs. Soon they became motionless. But later they darted away because a big, long-mouthed fish had suddenly appeared. Presently it was joined by another of almost equal size. Then the two swam leisurely about, but always just out of reach of Bill's spear. I found it tiresome waiting, but how much more so it must have been for the fisherman! I wondered how long he could endure it.

Later, however, the smaller fish made a sudden dart after a minnow, and passing nearer Bill's legs, his spear flashed into the lake, but he missed his aim.

"Better luck next time," the old man smiled, as he resumed his pose. Minutes passed again. I began to doze. Suddenly Lincoln exclaimed:

"Look up, Bill! It's coming down!"

I looked up, too. Something was falling from the sky—a huge bird. Head first it dropped with closed wings; it fell with the swiftness of a falling stone. Down, down, it came, and with a loud splash it struck the water a hundred feet beyond Bill. For a moment or two it was screened by flying spray. Then it arose with huge outspread wings beating the air, its talons embedded in a large, squirming fish. Up, up, it went. It was a fish hawk.

Then came another rush of wings, and we saw an even larger bird. It had a white head and an even greater spread. It swooped at the fish hawk. Now the air was filled with the sound of buffeting wings and angry screaming as the two great birds came together.

Feathers flew in all directions. Suddenly the fish dropped toward the river. Down it came like another stone; while with powerful flashing wings the big white-headed bird dived down after it. But the fish struck the water first, falling between Bill and us. As the great white-headed bird—it was a bald-headed eagle—curved its wings to check its descent, it thrust its wicked-looking talons far in advance of its now upright body in order to pick up the floating fish. At that moment, however, Bill hurled his spear, striking the eagle's pinions; feathers flew again, and with an angry *Cac*, that sounded almost human, the great bird rose on beating wings and soared away. But Bill got the fish. As he held it up with a finger hooked in its gills, Lincoln exclaimed:

"What a beauty!" and as the old hunter came ashore, the boy asked, "Is that one of the fish you tried to spear?"

"No. They're jack-fish. Up south they call 'em pike. This is a pickerel. Far better eatin'," Bill smiled. "I'll bet it 'ud go seven or eight pounds." Then, frowning, he added:

"Now, murderers or no murderers, we've got to risk a fire. Will you wait here or come along? I'm not goin' far."

"I'll go," I replied as I got up.

"Will we anchor the fish in the lake or hang it in a tree?" Lincoln inquired.

"Neither," replied Bill, "for if we leave it in the water a mink or otter may get it; an' if we hang it in a tree, a marten, a fisher, a lynx, or a bear may steal it.

There are lots of 'em around here. It's an unusually fine game country. Yet trappers never come here."

"How's that?" Lincoln asked.

"It's on the border line between th' Indians an' Eskimos, an' they, being deadly enemies, never run the risk of bein' found too near each other's country. It's become a regular no-man's land," explained Bill, as he slipped a switch through the fish's gill.

Zigzagging among the trees, the old half-breed halted beside a birch and with his knife removed a small sheet of bark. Rolling it into the form of a tube, he tied it with a thong of green willow bark and blocked one end with a wad of dry moss. It was for the carrying of some of his fire-making materials; and into it he put some dry, powdery punk taken from the inside of a rotten pine stump, as well as some shredded dry birchbark and dry moss. Searching for the best available wood to make a fire-drill and a fireboard, he broke from a fallen tamarack an inch-thick branch, of which he retained a ten-inch length to make a fire-drill; and from a lightning shattered pine he wrenched away a two-foot slab about six inches wide to answer as a fire-board. Farther on he picked up a broad flat chip to use as a socket in which to hold the upper end of the fire-drill. Breaking a branch into a two-foot length and stringing it with a thong cut from his leather belt, he now had a fire-bow. Thus he had all the materials he needed for making fire. Returning to the big boulder, he set about it in the usual Northern Indian way, and this is how he did it.

Opening his fire-tube he drew out some shredded pine

and quickly twirled it into a form that resembled a small bird-nest. Into it he poured a little dry, powdery punk, and laid the nest down beside his fire-board. Next he slipped a flat chip beneath the notched edge of the board to catch the first tiny glowing coal as soon as it formed. Then, placing his right knee and left foot upon the fire-board, he held the bow in his right hand, while its leather string encircled the vertical fire-drill which was capped with the socketed chip held firmly in the palm of his left hand.

Bearing down upon the drill, he began sawing the bow rapidly back and forth, back and forth; thus the string-encircled drill, revolving at great speed, soon created such intense friction in the socket of the fire-board that a powdery char formed within the notch, and as it began to smoke, tiny grains of glowing char dropped upon the flat chip. Picking up the chip, he dropped the tiny cluster of living coals upon the powdery punk in the little basket. Gently fanning them to increase their glow, he took the nest in hand and, swinging it rapidly to and fro, it soon became too hot for him to hold. Placing it upon the ground, he blew the little coals into flame and added shredded birchbark and dry twigs to the ever-increasing blaze. Thus in a few minutes our campfire was crackling and roaring a welcome to us.

"You must learn to do it, too," the old hunter advised, "an' remember the only trail to success is the trail to try."

The cheery fire and the thought of a good meal made Link and me imagine our troubles over, especially when Bill—without scaling or dressing—laid the fish upon a

flat stone which he slanted between the boulder and the fire. Soon we smelt an inviting odor.

"This is what th' Indians call bakin', but for roastin' we draw back the burnin' sticks, and without dressin' or scalin' the fish, place it on the glowin' embers, an' when cooked, remove the skin."

When the fish was cooked, Bill split it down the belly, disemboweled it, and removed the skin in a single sheet. Then he cut it in two, and dividing one half into three, he handed each of us a portion on a piece of birchbark. Then we pitched in. How I relished the food! Observing our enjoyment, the old man smiled:

"A contented beggar is richer than a discontented king; for contentment can buy more happiness than all the wealth in the world."

The meal finished, Bill rolled the rest of the fish in birchbark and remarked, as he began digging a hole in the ground beside the fire with a chisel-shaped stick:

"We must now set some rabbit snares; an' to catch rabbits we must go where there's rabbit food. For instance, aspen poplar an' birch. Aspen poplar is the tree with th' trembly leaves. That's why some call it quakin' asp. It often grows beside the birch. Rabbits also like willow an' wild rhubarb, wild celery, several kinds o' grasses, an' muskeg tea when in flower, an' even blue bells an' hyacinth blossoms."

Then he lined the pit with hot ashes and filled it with glowing coals, which he covered with ashes and earth and roofed with a sheet of birchbark to keep it dry in case it rained. He also wrapped another sheet

around some dry pine sticks and some dry birchbark to have in readiness for re-kindling the fire next morning. It looked as though there might be a thunderstorm.

He then led us through the woods until we entered a little grove of poplars and birches, and set us boys at breaking off tender twigs from those trees and heaping them in piles to attract rabbits, while he shaved three fine thongs from his leather belt. The thongs were to be used as snares. Each thong he set in a vertical loop above a rabbit's path and just high enough to enable a running rabbit to thrust its head within the noose, which was kept open with blades of grass. Each noose was tied with a running knot in such a way that pressure on the loop would release a pole, which, springing up, would haul the rabbit into the air and suspend it there, usually by the neck. On either side of the snare he arranged a little fence of broken brush to force the rabbits to keep to their runway, and thus improve the chance of catching them.

After setting the snares, curiosity led us on, and coming to a creek we discovered a beaver dam and three beaver houses. Hearing the sound of rapids, we turned up stream. It was a beautiful brook, rippling and sparkling through a jungle of overhanging trees and ferns.

Suddenly the old hunter stopped, and without turning his head signaled caution with his hand behind his back. Instinctively we understood. Seeing him sink upon his knees, we did likewise and noiselessly crawled after him through the undergrowth. Presently he stopped again. Peering over his back we beheld a sight to remember. An old black bear was squatting upon a

rock amid the noisy little rapids, not more than a hundred feet away.

"Keep still an' watch him," Bill whispered.

The bear was sitting with his hind legs outspread, and his heels braced against a ridge, while his stumpy little tail was curved over the boulder's edge, as though he were using it to help hang on. He was leaning over as if watching something in the brook. Suddenly his body dropped low, and through the swift, foam-flecked water he made a violent scoop with his upturned right forepaw. Then something whirled a quarter circle through the air and landed upon the opposite bank. The bear was fishing.

Renewing his motionless pose of stooping low and peering into the rapids, the bear never as much as noticed us, for the wind was blowing our scent away. The babbling brook drowned our whispering, and the leafy screen hid us from view. Minutes passed. Then there was another flash, another splash, another scoop, another shiny blur flying through the air, and another fish landed upon the bank. Glancing over his shoulder to see if the fish were safely ashore, the bear then resumed his pose, and again tiresome minutes passed. Then once more another splashing, flashing movement, and another fish was landed ashore.

Now I noticed among the leaves and ferns a little black object waddling toward the stranded fish, then another little black creature waddled after the first. They looked like twins and were black bear cubs. I imagined they were about six weeks old, judging from their size, for they were quite small. But Bill afterward told me:

"No. Not six weeks, but six months old; for bear cubs are born in January. The reason they look so small in midsummer is that they weigh only ten or twelve ounces at birth. In fact, when born they're only about the size of a red squirrel, while the mother may weigh four or five hundred pounds."

The playful little beggars started to eat the fish ashore, and now the old bear on the rock saw them and began to growl. It reminded me of the way white men swear. But the cubs didn't care. They went on eating. Then the old bear leaped off his rock, floundered through the foaming water, and made a rush for the cubs. When he caught them he struck them on the neck or head with first one and then the other of his open forepaws. His last two blows knocked them helter-skelter, and from fright and rage they screamed for their mother.

Instantly the top leaves of an alder clump began to swish and swirl; then the swishing and swirling leaves began running in a bee-line for the cubs. And when the swirling top leaves reached the end of the thicket nearest the cubs, out leaped another black bear. It was their mother. With a savage growl she lunged at the old black fisherman. With wonderful agility he dodged her gleaming teeth, but with all the force of which she could drive her long extended claws she hit him such a wallop that a patch of his new summer coat was torn away. Then, like a blue-black streak, the old male bear lit out for parts unknown. After eating the fish, the old lady bear and her little brats wandered away from "Beaver Creek," as Bill called it.

"Bears are certainly amusin' critters. They're

mighty human. They're enough to make an owl laff," the old half-breed chuckled.

On our way back to "Circle Bay," as Bill named it, we came upon some bear tracks, too, and while the hunter was examining them I said to Link:

"Now, if we were great hunters, we could, without even seeing the bear, tell when the brute had passed this way, even to the day, or maybe to the hour. We would know whether the bear was old or young, large or small, whether it was going fast or slow, or thinking of eating or sleeping."

"Who told you that, my boy?"

"The Giblets of a Bird."

"Then the Giblets of a Bird told you right. A good hunter can nearly always read a bear's story from its trail."

"I wish you'd tell us how," said Lincoln.

"My boy, the forest is like a book. It contains a great variety of stories—for those who can read the signs. But no one can read 'em properly unless he's well informed on the daily life of th' animals in question. It's only then a hunter can read all he sees. Many Indians are well posted on certain phases of natural history; much of the knowledge their ancestors gained has been told an' re-told from one generation to another. That's why even an Indian child is of more use in the woods than many a white man."

"Gee! I'd like to be a great hunter," I exclaimed.

"Fine, my son. I'm willin' to teach you. But before showin' you how to trail a bear, I should tell you how bears live throughout the year. Only then will you be able to read the signs."

I longed to hear more, and as good luck would have it, Link said:

“Bill, let’s rest a bit and you tell us about the ways of bears, will you please? Because I want to be a big-game hunter too.”

“Yes, I’ll teach you. It’s necessary I should. It may save your lives. We don’t know what may happen. They may drop me any moment. Then you boys’d starve. That’s why I mustn’t delay a single day; you must know how to hunt an’ fish an’ travel. But there’s a lot to learn. So pay attention an’ remember as much as you can.”

Settling himself in the shade with his back against a tree, we sat in front of him, eating berries, as he began:

“As I said before, bear cubs are born in January, while the mother’s hibernatin’. But it seems to me the life of a cub really begins in spring, when the cub an’ its mother leave their *o-wazhe*, or as the white man calls it, their ‘wash’ or den. But on second thought, let’s not begin with the spring life of a cub, but with the spring life of a full-grown male—the kind of game a hunter likes best to trail. Remember, boys, I’m goin’ to try an’ teach you, not only the ways o’ bears, but the ways of other animals too, and also somethin’ about birds. So listen carefully an’ I’ll tell you what it has taken generations of great hunters to learn.

“A black bear hibernates in a hollow tree, a hollow log, a cave, or in any likely place that’ll protect him from the worst of winter weather. An’ he may remain there three or four months, beginnin’ about the middle of *Akwutinoowe*—the Freezing Moon—or November. During the winter he may sleep dry and snug in his

wash, but in spring, when the snow begins to melt, his den gets damp. Even runnin' water may trickle in. Then he's uncomfortable. Waking up with many a stretch an' yawn, he paws away the dead leaves or rubbish with which he blocked th' entrance last fall. Thrustin' out his head, he looks aroun'; for at first he doesn't leave his den. Nor, when he first goes out, does he venture far from his home. The weather might suddenly change an' a cold snap overtake him before he'd return. Later, when he does leave his wash, he's restless an' cross. Though he avoids other bears he's ready an' willin' to fight 'em if they come his way.

"For a while he wanders about moanin' an' groanin' an' clawin' and gnawin' at the slimy inner bark o' trees, specially th' inner bark o' the poplar or the birch. For when eaten it acts upon his stomach much as the grass he also chews. Then in a few days, his system bein' in order, he stops moanin' an' groanin' an' eatin' grass an' chewin' trees an' sets about eatin' the regular food he now needs. It consists o' roots, insects, nuts, eggs, fruit, or honey, as well as small game in the way o' flesh, fish, or fowl. After a little regular feedin' he becomes normal in his habits, loses his quarrelsome mood, an' then seeks to chum with other bears. Boys, a good hunter always takes advantage o' what he knows. Instead o' killin' a solitary bear in that condition at that season o' th' year, th' hunter'll sometimes wait for th' bear to seek other bears, an' so in trailin' th' brute th' hunter is led to where there're other bears. So, a hunter may come upon a band o' bears numberin' anywhere from three to eight.

"The bears now seek th' rivers to fish below th' larger

rapids, or in shoal waters of smaller streams. Most o' their fishin's done in little rivers. Th' bear goin' to his fishin' place, not in th' side currents but in th' main channel, takes up his position where th' strong current strikes a rock. There he waits for th' river to bring the fish his way, as it's there th' fish most often pass in goin' down stream. When a fish comes within th' bear's reach, he doesn't strike at it with a direct blow or try to catch it with his claws. He makes a scoopin' motion, just as you saw him do. When th' fishin's good he doesn't go ashore until he may have landed ten to twenty, an' from that number he may only select th' best for his dinner."

"What kind of fish would they be?" inquired Link.

"In spring mostly suckers, an' he also catches 'em in shoal waters where they go to spawn. A full-grown sucker may weigh four or five pound. They're a long-headed, long-snouted fish; grayish brown on th' back an' whitish below. Though they do for food, you'll not eat 'em with relish. But the bear may catch any kind o' fish that comes his way. Each bear fishes upon a rock by himself, an' while most bears are right-handed, there're others that always use th' left forepaw to do their fishin'. They fight in the same way; and the hunter who's unexpectedly struck a left-handed blow isn't a great hunter. Th' reason bears grow up right an' left-handed is, it seems to me, that when twin cubs are born, they nearly always take the same position when feeding from their mother, an' will even fight to retain that position. So in early life they begin' usin' one paw more than another, an' so they grow up right or left-handed."

"Do bears fight much?" I asked.

"Not much, an' never to th' death, except once in a great while in the matin' season, which is during *Wawe Pesim*—the Egg Moon—or June. Then it's always a fight between two males or two females. Most of the fightin' is done by males, but she-bears 're very jealous; they won't stan' for a male payin' attention to another female. An' remember, too, my boys, that man's rarely ever attacked by an unprovoked bear. When it does happen, it's nearly always a female that attacks. She may have imagined that th' man was injurin' her cub. A mother bear'll fight desperately to save her young—just as a human mother will. The squeal of a cub is quite enough to start trouble, if th' mother is within earshot. Yet it's man who is forever calling animals wild—just because animals try to defend themselves when attacked by man. Of all wild animals, no animal is as wild as man.

"But, my boys, it's time we were gettin' back to camp, so we better be up an' doin'."

On our way back to our fireplace Bill remarked:

"Th' next thing we better do is to make our bed with a brush windbreak over it to catch th' heat o' th' fire. It was pretty chilly last night without any bed-clothes. Then we might try for some grouse. They'll be easier to catch about sunset."

After laying a brush mattress, the same as we did the night before, Bill cut a lot of evergreen branches, five or six feet in length, and ramming their butts into the ground, he slanted them over our bed toward the big rock to protect us from the wind and to reflect the heat of the fire upon us at night.

"Now, boys, let's try for some grouse," said old Bill as he began cutting another string-like thong from his leather belt. Then he cut a coarse thong of bark from a willow branch. Tying them together, he attached them to his fishing spear, and we started up the slope. As he led us here and there among the trees for perhaps a quarter of a mile, we saw a number of partridges feeding upon the ground, but we didn't get within striking distance before they rose with a startling whirr and rapidly disappeared among the trees. Yet they were rather tame and acted as if they had never before seen man.

"If I can't knock 'em down, I'll have to use a snare. Keep farther behind me, an' when I stop, stand perfectly still."

Returning by a different route, Bill presently stopped again, and we stood still. Then I saw seven partridge roosting on the branches of a spruce and all facing us. Forming the leather thong that was attached to his spear into a loop with a running knot, he let the bark thong dangle down the shaft so that he might pull it with his left hand when required.

"Stay here, boys, but move your arms a bit to attract 'em while I slip around."

Circling until he came up behind the tree, Bill raised the staff, shoved the open snare above one of the partridges, lowered the loop over its head, and, pulling the string, closed the noose about its neck without the grouse seeing him. Then he hauled it down and wrung its neck. Though the bird fluttered as he drew it from its perch, the other partridges didn't seem to mind, and



But the mother was too quick for him, and came with such a rush that he had to hurl himself, too, into the lake to escape her fury. Both cub and man splashed into the water near where two whooping cranes were fishing; and with startled squawks and great flapping wings they slowly rose as the mother bear leaped after her cub.

thus he secured three before the others flew away. As he held up the three he said:

“See, they’re Ruffed Grouse. It’s the feathered ruff about their necks that gives ’em their name. They’re the birds that make that strange drummin’ sound you may of heard in the woods in spring, an’ sometimes in the fall. It’s done by the cock bird beatin’ his wings to attract the hens. In midwinter Northern grouse, like the ptarmigan, dive straight down with closed wings, head first into the deep soft snow; then they burrow a few feet away from the entrance, so that the fox or wolf or lynx won’t know exactly where they’re spendin’ the night. They sleep beneath th’ snow to keep warm. They live on buds, leaves, berries, seeds, an’ insects. In winter a bony fringe grows about their feet an’ so increases the width o’ their toes that their feet can support ’em even on deep, soft snow.”

When we returned to our fireplace Bill told us to take some hot coals from the fire-pit and rekindle the fire. Then he showed us how to bake partridge in clay the way it is done by the Indians.

“My boys, go down to that cut-bank near where we were fishin’ an’ each bring all the clay you can carry in your hands. Nice soft clay. But you better roll up your sleeves.”

On our return the old man took one of the grouse, feathers and all, and putting its head under a wing he plastered it all over with an inch or so of clay. Raking back the embers, he buried the bird in a bed of live coals. He treated the other two likewise.

“The time required for such cookin’ depends on the

size o' the birds. If they're to be eaten by white men, it usually takes an hour for partridge. But if they're to be eaten by Indians, about half that time will do, as Indians like their meat rare."

"How can you tell when they're cooked?" Link asked.

"By removin' th' coals. If th' clay's cracked, the bird's cooked and'll soon burn. But if the clay isn't cracked an' is still moist, the bird' ll stand more cookin'—that is, if it's to be eaten by a white man."

Putting us in charge of the fire and the cooking, Bill busied himself cutting a groove in the butt of a strong, six-foot spruce staff, and into the groove he fitted the handle of his knife, as it was to be bound there whenever he wanted to make use of it as a spear. When the grouse were cooked Bill split off the hard-baked clay and with it went the feathers and skin, leaving the body quite clean. Carving a bird for each of us, we then pitched in and found them delicious.

After supper Link and I wandered off a way, and coming upon a bear cub we chased it up a tree, and as we climbed up after it, it began to squeal. Old Bill, hearing it, shouted to us to look out for the mother as he came to our rescue on the run.

Hearing a growl below, we glanced down and saw the wild-eyed mother climbing up the tree toward us. Now we were cornered. But as good luck would have it, the frightened cub climbed farther out from the trunk, and we heard a sudden crack. The broken branch giving way, the cub fell to the ground.

Instantly rushing forward, old Bill seized the half-stunned brute and, dragging it to the rocky brink, he

intended to hurl it into the lake, in order to get the mother away from us boys; but the mother was too quick for him and came with such a rush that he had to hurl himself, too, into the water to escape her fury.

Both cub and man splashed into the lake near where two whooping cranes were fishing; and with startled squawks and great flapping wings they slowly rose as the mother bear leaped after her cub. Then, as the old hunter crawled safely ashore, we boys watched the two bears swimming across the lake.

“My boys,” puffed the old man, “never again, as long as you live, get between a bear an’ her cub, for if the cub squeals, th’ old lady’ll kill you if she can. It’s mighty lucky for you that that branch broke an’ that I happened along.”

CHAPTER IV

THE WAY OF WOLVES

WHILE sitting beside the fire at twilight as Bill dried his clothes, I saw something swoop down forty or fifty feet through the air and land on the ground, much as a bird might have done. But it wasn't a bird. It had four legs and a flat, furry tail, and somewhat resembled a red squirrel. But its long swooping flight was very different from that of an ordinary squirrel, and so was its general coloring of fawny-brown. The little flying creature was about a foot long. Its movements on the ground, however, were much the same as those of the red squirrel. When I asked Bill Hill what it was he replied:

"My boy, it's a Canadian flyin' squirrel. They're fairly common in this country of pine an' spruce and live mostly on the seeds of those trees. They nest in hollow trunks an' are active all the year 'round. Even on midwinter nights, they'll come out to play or hunt, for they're night animals. They delight especially in evenin' flights from tree to tree or from tree to ground. Some evenin's I've sat beside my fire an' watched scores of 'em in flight. They seemed to do it, too, from sheer delight. Though they're so buoyant an' active in th' air, they have to watch out or th' owl will get 'em. Besides, th' ermine an' th' marten are also on the look-out for 'em."

Darkness now began to drive twilight away. We chatted comfortably on our brush bed as we faced the cheery fire. Meanwhile the loons on the lake were calling to one another, and two deep-voiced owls were oo-koo-whooping to each other, while the howling of wolves that we first heard about an hour before was steadily drawing nearer.

Before lying down to sleep the old half-breed stocked the fire-pit with coals and covered it over with ashes, earth, and birchbark, as he again thought it was going to rain.

During the night violent thunder awoke us with a start, and every once in a while a shaft of lightning set the woods aglare. Its repeated brilliancy caused the old hunter to sit up.

"Boys," he whispered, "don't speak, but look out there."

In the intense light of the momentary flashes we saw four wolves sitting upon their haunches in a semicircle about sixty feet away, and, standing upon all fours as though he had paused in walking, a fifth wolf, the largest of the pack, stood gazing at us, not more than forty feet from our windbreak. Then total darkness enveloped everything. The fire was dead out. Not only could I see nothing—I could hear nothing save Lincoln's and my own heavy breathing. Then another dazzling flash showed us that the big wolf had advanced a little closer, while the others were now standing upon all fours, but absolutely motionless. Blackness fell again, bringing a terrific crash of rolling thunder. My hair seemed to stand on end. Overwhelmed with awe at the impenetrable darkness, and

with fear of the approaching wolves, I put out my hand to make sure that the old hunter was still beside me when a blood-curdling howl stopped the beating of my heart and froze me dumb with fright.

There was a clawing, rustling, tearing sound in front of me. Next two glaring eyes were staring at me. Now they were growing larger . . . they must be coming nearer. How soon would it spring? How long would I live . . . if I didn't die of fright before the brute leaped upon me?

But strange to say a radiant light now sprang ablaze from the very spot where the two eyes had been, and I could see good old Bill placing shredded birchbark on glowing coals. Presently the face of the rock and the inside of our windbreak were illumined by leaping flames; and it seemed to me that the old hunter's fire had saved our lives.

"Oh, gee! I thought we were goners . . . when I heard that howl," Link breathlessly exclaimed.

"Let's have a great big fire, Bill. It'll help keep them away," I begged.

"An' burn up all our wood. Then you'll have to go out an' feel aroun' in the pitch-black night to get a few more sticks," commented the old half-breed. "But there's no occasion to worry 'bout the wolves, so stop it. It's a waste o' time."

"But, Bill, those wolves are regular man-eaters." Link shuddered.

"My lad, where did you learn that man-eatin' stuff?" the old woodsman asked.

"From the newspapers and magazines," replied Lincoln.

"Then if I was you I wouldn't mention it. Th' only danger o' being attacked by wolves is when one goes too close to a trapped, cornered, or wounded wolf. Or if one meets a wolf that's afflicted with distemper or hydrophobia. Otherwise you needn't worry about being molested by 'em."

"But, Bill, I've often read in the newspapers about wolves not only killing women and children, but men too; such as mail carriers and trappers and hunters," I exclaimed.

"Yes, my son, so've I," Bill Hill smiled. "But there's little chance of ever findin' truth in such stories. I happen to know, because I've often run 'em down—especially when the newspapers mentioned the name of the place where the blood-curdlin' tragedy happened. But, of course, upon investigation it always turned out to be, not the work of a pack of wolves, but of a pack of lies.

"All that most newspaper wolf stories mean is that a poorly paid an' over-worked reporter wanted to buy a new hat or take his best girl to dinner; so, well knowin' that the best bait with which to catch an extra check would be a wolf story, he 'mediately concocted one. That's the sole reason why so many Canadians are annually killed an' eaten by wolves.

"But there're other facts you ought to know," said the hunter. "Timber, or gray wolves, the kind you've just seen, the kind that live throughout the North Woods, don't go in big packs. Three to five form th' usual pack. Though it's not impossible to see as many as even eight or perhaps ten in a single pack.

"The timber wolf sometimes stands thirty inches at

the shoulder an' measures 'bout five feet in length. In color he averages a light brownish gray, or a light bluish gray, though his coat may range from almost white to almost black. He's a great roamer, except, of course, durin' a few weeks when his mate's breedin', usually in April. Then, to help feed his family, he stays in the neighborhood of her den, which may be a hollow log, tree, or stump, or a rocky cave or hole in the ground. For the first few days after the young are born, the male usually supplies the food. But a week or so later he may remain at home to watch the cubs while the mother does her own huntin'. She doesn't go far, as she hunts mostly rabbits and partridge.

"Then, when the mother an' her cubs are ready for the trail, away goes the father to hunt big game. That may take him through a region a hundred miles long. Yet I've known a pack o' seven return to the same spot on their regular circular huntin' trail every fifth or sixth night, not only durin' a whole summer, but to do it too, for several years."

"How much does a big wolf weigh?" Link asked.

"Full-grown timber wolves weigh from seventy-five to one hundred and fifty pound," replied the woodsman. "They're fast travelers, yet they can't outrun the wolfhound. Though they're seldom seen in water, they're good swimmers."

"But I don't see how they can catch a deer," I remarked.

"Gordon, my boy, when they're huntin' big game, the male usually takes the lead an' does most o' the hard work, though the mother an' cubs lope behind and are always ready to cut a corner or help in any way they

can. But when they get close to the quarry, it's not the male but the more vicious female that more often rushes forward an' makes the first spring to bring down the game. She aims at hamstringin' the prey, an' while the male leaps for the throat, or the base o' the neck, the little cubs keep a respectful distance. But they do a lot of yappin' while they're learnin' how to throw an' kill th' quarry.

"If wolves have killed a moose or caribou, the mother wolf will rip open the belly o' the deer, an' then the little cubs'll come an' feed. But at first the male seems to devote himself to drinkin' the blood from th' quarry's throat before he turns to eatin' any other part. If they've been followin' a band o' deer an' have already killed one, the wolves'll not continue chasin' th' other deer. They'll stop to feed, an' it may take 'em several days to eat the rest o' the carcass—perhaps a week in the case of a moose. Then they'll start huntin' again. When wolves are real hungry an' settle down to trail a certain track, they seldom turn aside, even though other tracks may cross th' one they're followin', but they keep right on until they've done their best to overhaul their quarry. Though in that way they're not as persistent as the wolverine.

"When wolves attack a white-tailed deer they usually seize it by the base o' the throat. But when attackin' caribou or moose, they may seize it by th' upper part o' the throat. Perhaps because that part o' the throat of the moose or caribou is protected less by the neck's long, stiff hair than is the base o' the throat. When a moose has been hamstrung by a wolf—that is, when the cords of a hind leg have been severed—it causes the

moose great pain. Though it can still run on three legs, it has little chance to kick or strike. The pain the moose suffers from bein' hamstrung may cause it to throw up its head. Thus th' upper part of its throāt becomes exposed, an' one of the wolves may instantly slash the moose's throat.

"Are you boys sleepy? Do you want to turn in?" the old man asked.

"No, no. Not a bit. Go on, please. Tell us more," we coaxed.

"All right." Old Bill smiled as he made up the fire. "In trying to hamstring a moose, the wolf may strike too high or too low, an' even though it tries to hold on with its teeth, or sever the cords by chewin', it may be kicked off or smashed against a tree by the sudden whirlin' round o' the deer. The right place to hamstring a moose is about six inches above th' elbow of the hind leg. To make sure of the strike the wolf must follow, not directly behind the runnin' moose or caribou, but a little to one side, an' that's hard to do if the deer's fleeing among thick timber. But when an old veteran wolf does the work, his great sharp fangs sever the cords as though the leg had been slashed by a sword. Th' other wolves then close in, watchin' for a chance to spring at the throat. But if there's thick timber near, the moose'll make for it in the hope o' puttin' up a final fight. Or if there happen to be other bulls about, the wounded animal will lunge among 'em in the hope the bulls'll fight the wolves. But even then the wolves won't turn aside; they'll try to bring down their original quarry.

"When wolves are runnin' caribou, it more often hap-

pens that an old bull falls to 'em, as the younger deer can outrun the older ones. Wolves aren't noted for their keenness of sight, but their hearin' an' smellin' are very good. An' though the wolf is always ready to eat flesh, fish, an' fowl, he'll at times even turn to vegetation such as wild rhubarb an' wild celery. Most timber wolves fight alike. If his prey is standin' at bay, he'll not attack straight on, but'll repeatedly race by, pretendin' not even to look at his quarry. Then, should he catch his prey off guard for even a single moment, he'll instantly whirl an' strike so quick with his fangs that his unfortunate victim has no time to leap aside or defend himself."

"How do hunters kill a wolf when they catch it in a trap?" I asked.

"My boy, when a wolf is caught in a steel trap th' usual way o' killin' it is for the hunter to approach with his small ax held half high, then at the right moment to strike a quick blow with the back of it. The hunter aims to hit the brute, not on top of its head but on the most vital spot, just below the brow between th' eyes. Then, if he has stunned the beast, he delivers another blow, but this time with the blade of th' ax in order to split the wolf's skull. But, remember, boys, it takes a harder blow to stun a dog than it does to stun a wolf.

"Wolves sleep any old way. If cold they curl up. If warm, they stretch out. But they usually try to sleep beneath some shelter, as they don't like sleepin' in th' open—except durin' the warm sunny days of early spring, when they may be seen sleepin' out on th' ice of either river or lake. But the wolf prefers to hunt in bad weather, perhaps because the worse the storm, the

more easily he can approach unsuspectin' game. That's especially true at night, his favorite time o' huntin'.

"The wolf makes an ugly lookin' track, as you'll probably see in the mornin'. The claw marks show strongly an' the tread is longer than its width, which is especially true of the hind feet. The wolf's usual gait is a slovenly walk or lope. His hind quarters bein' higher than his fore quarters doesn't improve his looks.

"Now, boys, I think th' thunder's over an' it's not goin' to rain after all; so we better get a little more sleep. But don't worry about the wolves. They won't come in here, even if they do come back. An' the chances are they're already a mile or two away from here."

The first thing we did next morning was to examine the wolf tracks, and at one place in damp ground near the spring we saw very clear impressions of them. The size of one set of tracks was surprising; they were much larger than those of any dog I had ever seen, and the marks proved the claws very long and sharp.

We then went to examine the rabbit snares. The first snare was still set, the second had been sprung by a rabbit and then robbed by a wolf. The third snare, however, contained a rabbit. After fixing the broken one and resetting both, we returned to our fireplace. The air was so heavily laden with cold mist from the lake that we hurried to make up our fire. Bill then showed us how to dress a rabbit.

First he cut the skin down the inside of each hind leg until the two cuts met below the tail; then he peeled back the skin and drew it down, inside out and off the

body, as one might remove a sock. Cutting off the head and cutting open the carcass lengthwise between the legs in order to disembowel it, he next laid the body apart, as one opens a book, and trussed it with a couple of wooden skewers in readiness for roasting. Securing a stick about four feet long, he split the butt and, opening the split, inserted the rabbit, binding the split ends together with green willow bark in order to hold the rabbit securely while cooking. Ramming the thin end of the stick into the ground, he slanted it over the fire but out of the smoke, and presently the rabbit began to cook.

"Indians call this way o' cookin' *ponasking*, which means toastin'; an' it's not a bad way to cook fish. But instead of splittin' th' butt of th' stick, you should sharpen it an' shove th' butt into th' fish's mouth toward th' tail, an' slant it over th' fire, in this way," remarked the old man.

After breakfast, Bill said:

"My boys, now that we'll be here for several weeks, I'm goin' to build a fish barrier across Beaver Creek."

"What's a fish barrier?" asked Link.

"It's a stone dam across a stream, with an open slide to carry off th' overflow; an' below which a basket is set to catch the fish that venture through. It'll work for us every hour in the twenty-four; at least, it will as long as we leave the basket there. Then we'll not only have all the fish we can eat, but we'll have plenty too for dryin' an' smokin' for our trip. So we must now hump ourselves an' get to work. You boys eat some berries while I look for some poles to build our lean-to against this boulder."

When I saw old Bill Hill working so hard near our berry patch I stopped eating to lend him a hand. Selecting a dead spruce about four inches thick, he hacked a ring round its butt; then we swayed it back and forth until we broke it off. Removing its brittle branches and lopping off its tip, it was left about fifteen feet in length. Likewise Bill trimmed another of the same size, and we carried them over to the boulder. After gathering a number of smaller spruce poles and some long, strong ribbons of green willow bark, Bill laid the two longest poles parallel upon the ground and about eight feet apart; then fastened them together at the butt by means of a slender traverse bar which he lashed securely into place with the thongs of willow bark. About five feet from the tip of the poles he bound another traverse bar to them; but this time he used a stronger one, as it had to carry considerable weight. Then between the long poles and parallel with them he fastened two slender poles at equal distances apart.

Across the four parallel poles and between the two traverse bars he secured a number of slender bars about eighteen inches apart. It was to the latter Bill intended fastening sheets of birchbark to act as shingles. Link, then coming over, also lent help by binding the poles together wherever they crossed one another. Thus in a short time we finished the framework that was to serve as a slanting roof for our shelter.

The next thing the old hunter did was to set out in search of big birch trees that would yield large enough sheets of bark to make the roof and ends of our shelter rainproof. So up the slope we went toward a grove of

birches, and it was not long before we were using wooden chisels to remove the bark from the trees, but as it was not the right season for such work, we found it hard to gather the quantity we needed. Placing the bark inside out, to shed the rain better, we laid it shingle fashion and tied it securely to the crossbars with strong, string-like spruce roots.

When the work was completed we raised one end of the frame aloft, and rested the projecting ends of the two long poles upon the top edge of the boulder; thus slanting the roof toward the ground at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Then closing each of the open ends with a perpendicular framework that was covered with birchbark, our shelter was completed. It was rainproof except on the side next the fire, where the edges of the open side stood back from the rock about three feet, and thus left an entrance at each end as well as an overhead vent for the smoke between the roof and rock.

After lunch, having some bark left over, we built a little shed near at hand, beneath which we stored firewood to keep it dry. The old half-breed also built a stage or platform about six feet high upon which to store supplies beneath a covering of birchbark.

Link and I were so delighted with the cosiness of our new camp that Bill said:

“My boys, did you ever notice that it’s the townsman who talks like a philosopher an’ lives like a fool? He’s the man who slaves all his life to pay for a home he seldom owns an’ out of which he’s thrown when the rent’s overdue. Yet, a woodsman can build in a couple o’ hours a home that costs him nothin’ more than a

few drops o' sweat. I've noticed, too, that when the citizen visits the woods, he exclaims: 'Oh, Heaven!' An' when the woodsman visits the city he exclaims: 'Oh, hell!'"

Late that afternoon, being tired and hungry, we set out in search of a good feed of berries. A little way from camp a sudden short, chattering scream attracted our attention; something invisible scurrying among dry, rustling leaves passed swiftly toward a tree. Then we espied the cause. A red squirrel was being chased by what I at first thought to be a young fox, but its coat and bushy tail were a rich, dark brown, while its breast was of orange.

Up the tree scurried the frightened squirrel with the other animal in hot pursuit. Up, up, they raced, but the tree was standing alone beside the lake. How could the squirrel escape? Out upon a branch it darted, and without pausing a moment took a flying leap far out over the water, and with widespread legs and tail sailed like a bird in descent; and down it splashed into the lake. But the other animal, instead of increasing its speed in order to follow with a flying leap, hesitated a moment, then lost its nerve while its prey swam away. Then the faint-hearted four-legged hunter turned about and we lost sight of it among the branches of the jack pine.

"What was it?" I asked.

"A marten, my boy."

"I thought the squirrel was a goner," said Link.

"An' so it would uv been if it hadn't jumped, for the marten, as you saw, is a very active animal in a tree. So active that it can even outrun the squirrel. But the



The wolverine was a powerful, bear-like beast, and in order to defend itself, it had turned over on its back; and lying in a depression on the rocky slope, it was ready to fight with all four sets of claws as well as its jaws. The wolves were racing around and leaping about in their sly efforts to slash their prey; but so far the wolverine had succeeded in keeping them off.

red squirrel is a good swimmer an' won't hesitate to cross a lake several miles wide. Once when I was paddlin' down a long three-mile wide lake, I happened to meet a red squirrel swimmin' across, an' he was already halfway over. When I slowed down just ahead o' him an' slanted my paddle toward him, he took advantage o' my offer, crawled out on the blade, shook himself, rested a little while, then ran up the paddle handle an' my arm as well, an' contented himself on my shoulder for five minutes or more. Then, rested, he leaped into the water an' set out again to finish his journey to the northern shore."

"Have red squirrels many enemies?" Link asked.

"The marten is his worst; though owls an' hawks worry him a good deal an' are ever on the watch for him."

"Tell us about red squirrels," I coaxed.

"They're not of much account. We never bother about their fur. Though they kill an endless number of birds, as well as destroy their eggs, they live mostly on seeds an' nuts an' berries; but their chief food is the seed of the jack pine and the spruce, which they store for winter use. They usually live in hollow trunks, though in this country they are also given to buildin' weatherproof nests of bark among th' upper branches of the trees. The young are born in spring. Red squirrels don't seem to mind the cold much; for even on a sunny midwinter day you may see 'em scurryin' about as though they enjoyed the weather. But you boys ought to know as much as I do about red squirrels; for they live in your country too."

"Then tell us about martens," Lincoln asked.

“Well, to begin with, only in looks is the marten a beautiful animal. He’s got so many bad habits that he’s detested by those who know him. However, his fur is only prime during three months of the year: December, January, an’ February, though it’s fairly good in October an’ November, as well as in March an’ April. But as soon as the sun grows strong the fur loses its greatest value. A mild spell of rain comin’ in winter also affects the fur; dark patches will show on the inside of the skin, and the color of the fur will change. The sun affects the tips of the hair first, bleaching it like it bleaches grass. But rain’ll affect the whole condition of the skin and fur.

“The female usually makes her nest in a hollow tree; sometimes using a squirrel’s or woodpecker’s hole; or she may burrow beneath the roots of a tree or make use of a hole once used by a fox or skunk. As a rule they’re local animals. Though when food grows scarce they may migrate to a better feedin’ ground. They’re found most in park-like regions of heavy-growth evergreens. They feed on rabbits, squirrels, mice, insects, an’ birds, as well as their eggs and young. Though the marten’ll not catch fish, it’ll eat ’em when it finds ’em. They also eat wild celery an’ wild rhubarb, an’ will even nibble at wild parsnip, which th’ Indians claim makes their coats a beautiful dark brown. Perhaps that’s why the finest marten skins secured in the whole of Canada come from the region of the Parsnip River. Though only about five hundred skins are annually taken in that district, they’re finer an’ darker an’ larger than the skins taken in any other part of the Dominion.

“The young, usually four to six, are born in early

spring an' soon develop into lively little creatures. Though great tree climbers, they're not good swimmers, but'll undertake to cross a brook or little river. The marten is a great thief an' ever ready to rob a cache or stage, an' usually leaves a bad odor—not the equal o' the skunk, but about the same as th' ermine. Moreover, they're very quarrelsome creatures, so much so that two martens rarely ever meet without fightin'.

“An' that reminds me, my boys, that the more angry one gets, the less he's apt to listen to reason. The test of a knife an' the test of a man is temper. But bad temper spoils a man as readily as it spoils a knife.”

“Do martens store their food?” I asked.

“Yes, but they often forget where they've cached it. In midwinter martens are not so active as during the rest of the year, an' it's then that th' Indian, relying less upon his traps, hunts them with his dog an' gun. The dog helps bring th' hunter to a marten tree, where the little animal may be seen pokin' its head out of its hole. To avoid the risk of killin' the little brute in its home an' having to chop down the tree to get it out, the hunter'll walk slowly 'round the tree, and the marten's curiosity will force it to leave its hole to see what the hunter's doin'. Then the hunter takes aim an' drops the little brute at the foot of the tree. When upon the ground, as perhaps you noticed, the marten travels mostly by a few leaps an' bounds followed by a step or two, an' then repeats his springin'.”

After supper Bill took us over to Beaver Creek, and just as we neared the pond we caught sight of something that held us spellbound. Down through a small leafy tunnel we saw four wolves attacking a wolverine.

Though smaller than the wolves, the wolverine was a powerful, bear-like beast, and in order better to defend itself it had turned over on its back, and, lying in a depression of the rocky slope, it was ready to fight with all four sets of claws as well as its powerful jaws. The wolves were racing around and leaping about in their sly efforts to slash their prey; but so far the wolverine had succeeded in keeping them off.

For some moments we silently watched the brutes in the light of the sunset glow as it was reflected in the pond's still water. But presently the wolves caught scent of us, and instantly both wolves and wolverine vanished to left and right. It was a thrilling sight.

"Would a single wolf attack a wolverine?" Lincoln asked.

"My boy, I'll tell you about wolverines some other time," the old hunter answered.

CHAPTER V

DEATH AGAIN APPROACHES

LUCKILY, on our way back, we struck a fine patch of blueberries quite near camp, and fell to feasting without delay. A little breeze was blowing the mosquitoes away, and an opening between the trees afforded us a view of the lake. Among the whispering branches little birds sang sweetly; overhead gulls called shrilly; while upon the lake a flock of loons, six or eight, sported wildly about, rushing along the surface with paddling feet, their flapping wings beating the soft water into foam as they chased each other with sardonic laughter.

“Do loons lay their eggs in trees?” Link asked.

A sudden burst of laughter from me made the old woodsman frown in my direction, but my mental picture of a loon trying to lay an egg up in a tree was as funny to me as though a crane had tried to do it too, and I followed my laughter with:

“Yes, and so do herons.”

Instantly the old hunter replied:

“My son, bein’ fresh isn’t bein’ funny. That’s exactly what herons do.” Then turning to Lincoln he added:

“Learn all you can, my boy, an’ then some day you may know almost as much ’bout the woods as some Indians do. You asked about loons. Loons lay two

eggs upon the ground, usually so close to water that when danger threatens, a single plunge from the nest'll submerge the bird. Swimmin' under water, far from shore, the loon then rises to the surface to see the cause of alarm. Durin' spring, summer, an' fall loons live on Northland lakes an' rivers; then by their swift daylight flyin' they migrate to Southern waters to spend the winter. You may know a loon by the fact that it's larger than a duck an' smaller than a goose; an' it walks like a drunken man. Its head, neck, an' back are black, but its neck's marked with white streaks an' its back with white dots, while its breast's pure white. Its straight, sharp-pointed bill is good for catchin' fish.

"Yesterday, when a blue heron flew over, I heard Gordon call it a crane. He should learn the difference between the two. A crane doesn't fly with its neck curved back an' its head between its shoulders, as does the heron. A crane flies with its neck outstretched. Yet both fly with their legs trailin' beyond their tail. The heron is a wader an' still-huntin' fisherman in open shallows, an' secures his food—frogs, fish, or mice—by strikin' at it with his long, sharp bill. Often in large flocks herons build their big, bulky nests of sticks in the tops of tamarack trees that stand in swamps. But while the crane builds its nest in a marshy place too, it is made of reeds laid on the ground. The crane is also a hunter of fish, frogs, and mice. The heron's a tall bird, but the crane's even taller. Sometimes it stands higher than a man's waist."

After supper Bill Hill returned to Beaver Creek and carefully selected a straight, dry, willow stick about

five feet long and two inches thick, as well as ten straight willow wands about three feet long and as thick as a man's little finger. When Link asked what they were for, the old woodsman replied:

"Bow an' arrows."

"How about a string?"

"A thong from my belt'll do. But if I hadn't leather, I'd make a twisted string o' green willow bark."

On our way back we came upon three ruffed grouse in a tree. Old Bill snared one. While sitting in the glare of our evening fire, he said:

"Remember, boys, anything's liable to happen, an' we got to be ready. We need bows an' arrows."

Using a short, stout stick in place of a mallet, he drove his knife into the end of the bigger willow stick, carefully allowing the blade to follow the grain of the wood as he split it from end to end. Thus, by removing, one after another, four sides of the stick, he squared it and then shaved it into a bow with gracefully tapering ends, notched in readiness to receive its four-foot leather string.

Next he peeled and shaved the willow wands into two-and-a-half foot lengths; and splitting one end of each, he slipped into the split a tiny sliver of stone, binding it there with a string of green willow bark. Then splitting a grouse's wing feather, he bound one half on either side of the arrow's tail. Thus he made a number of stone-headed and feather-tipped arrows, as well as a roll of birchbark with a willow bark sling to act as a quiver, in order that he might carry the arrows on his back.

For a while we sat beside the dying fire and silently watched its flickering glow. Even the distant howling of wolves had stopped; and so quiet had it grown that one another's breathing suggested a distant gale. Presently the old hunter whispered:

"Do you hear the little singers?"

At first I thought he was joking, but when he assured us he was in earnest, I too listened and presently detected the faintest waves of singing—so faint, indeed, that Link too had failed to hear them. As Bill listened to the almost soundless singing, a kindly smile played upon his face, coming and going in unison with the flickering of the fire.

"Do you see the little singers?" he asked.

Following his line of vision, I discovered the two tiny, mouse-like musicians flitting about in the dim firelight, and when their playfulness afforded a nearer view I noticed their long, pointed snouts. They were not mice, nor had I ever before seen such creatures. They were about three inches long, with brown coats upon their backs and light gray below. I glanced inquiringly at our old friend and he whispered:

"They're shrews. They're found all over this country, mostly in well-watered grassy or bushy places. Their little den's often a tiny hollow in a tree or stump or log. They don't burrow. Their food's principally worms an' bugs. Their eyes are so small that you can scarcely see where they belong. Shrews hunt both day an' night. But don't try to catch one in your hand."

"Why?" I asked.

"They've a disgustin' odor. Perhaps that's why

there's so many billions of 'em in this land. They've got such a rotten smell that many a meat-eatin' animal an' bird refuses to dine on 'em."

Soon after lying down upon our brush bed, I fell asleep, but some time after midnight I awoke—to hear a strange sound. Listening intently I heard it again. Though it was so far away that it was scarcely distinguishable, I thought it sounded like men or animals walking in water. Now I could hear it repeatedly. It began to worry me. I wondered if I should call old Bill. Later I arose and in the faint light of a clouded sky silently stepped over Link and awoke the old hunter by touching him and saying:

"Listen!"

At once he sat up and was all attention.

"There—did you hear?" I whispered.

"Yes," he nodded and, getting up, went outside.

After a short wait we heard the sound again.

"It's a small band of caribou crossin' the narrows. If it was moonlight I might get a few. I'll try, anyway."

As we skirted the southern shore, we caught sight of three moving silhouettes against the northern sky. They were passing westward along the ridge and traveling up wind. In the hope of getting within range of the game trail Bill crept up the slope and patiently waited for more deer to follow. But no more came. About half an hour later he said:

"Next time I'll be ready for 'em. I'm goin' to build a blind. But after all, we can't count on caribou, so I better make the fish barrier first."

When I awoke next morning at sunrise Bill Hill was

already cooking a fish that he had speared in our little bay. After breakfast we visited the snares, but there was nothing in them, so we continued up the slope in search of berries. Following the course of the spring, we came to a clump of evergreens growing beneath a steep embankment out of which ran the tiny brook. On entering the grove the old hunter discovered a rocky cave in which there still remained a mass of ice that neither summer sun nor southern breeze had melted.

"A good place to hang an' store our meat," Bill smiled. "Now, if we can get some deer, we can lay in a stock of grub for our trip. Let's go an' look at last night's tracks."

On the way we banked our fire. There were many signs of caribou on the point, and on further investigation the hunter found that they had descended the big rock by way of the old game trail.

"It seems to be a regular crossin' place for caribou, an' fifteen or twenty must have passed here last night. From the way things look I wouldn't be surprised if you'll have a taste o' caribou steak before long. Do you see those masses of old caribou hair that've drifted there?" he asked, as he pointed along the shore. "That was shed from the winter coats of hundreds o' deer while they swum across here last spring. The water's lower now, so they only have to wade. Caribou have remarkable hair. Th' inner layer's composed of an oily wool, while each hollow hair o' th' outer coat contains a little air chamber; that's why caribou are so very buoyant."

"Are caribou hard to hunt?" Link asked.

"Sometimes, my boy, they're impossible to approach.

But then, again, they occasionally act in a most erratic way, sometimes even comin' right up to the hunter. I've known it happen while I was travelin' on a lake in winter with two of my Indian friends. We sighted a band o' caribou, an' though we made no effort to approach 'em, the deer came close to us an' our dog teams. Even after we shot a number of 'em, th' others trotted 'round an' 'round our sleds. There's no accountin' for caribou. At one time they're without fear. At another time they're so shy that a hunter with an express rifle can't get within range. In early summer their strange behavior's often due to their bein' pestered by flies an' mosquitoes. Later on they're sometimes driven nearly crazy by attacks of the warble fly. Its long stinger penetrates the hide o' the deer an' deposits eggs there that develop into maggots. The maggots eventually eat through the skin an' render the hide almost worthless. These tracks here are those o' cows an' calves. If they were the tracks o' bulls, I wouldn't be so hopeful about this bein' a regular crossin' place for caribou."

"You spoke of a blind. What's a blind?" I asked.

"A blind is a screen behind which to hide when game approaches. I'll make one of evergreen boughs, somewhere around here, so that when we see caribou descendin' the rock we can hide behind the blind an' be within arrow range when the deer wade ashore on this point. But first I'm goin' to tackle the fish barrier. It's a surer way of gettin' food. Let's go over to the creek now."

On coming to the stream old Bill waded up and down it for several hundred paces before he decided to build

the fish barrier on the edge of a shelf of fairly flat rock that crossed the creek, and over which the water ran in a little cascade with about a three-foot drop. At that point the brook was about twenty feet wide; and as there were plenty of loose flat stones, he decided to begin at once. So we started in.

We boys carried or rolled big stones to the old woodsman while he built them into a wall across the creek. Then when we grew tired and wanted to rest for a while, he gave us his knife and showed us the kind of willow switches to cut for the making of the basket. In less than half an hour we had gathered several armfuls of long, slender switches; and then he stopped his work again to show us how to weave a big, coarse basket, after the Indian fashion, for the holding of the fish.

First he interlaced switches so as to form a mat a couple of feet square. Then by bending up the free ends and interweaving them with strands running horizontally, he began to form the upright sides. Though it was hard work at first, we persevered, and by degrees the basket grew until its sides were about three feet high; and then Bill cut off the butts and twisted the alternating slender tips about the last horizontal strands that ran round the top. Thus it was completed, a strong, serviceable, though crude affair, but the making of it had given us much satisfaction.

"My boys, when I see how ready an' willin' you are to work, it pleases me. We shouldn't live to work but should work to live. Hunger an' cold are often the wages o' laziness; while common sense an' work usually win contentment."

During the afternoon a hot south wind threatened a change in weather, so we knocked off work to gather a two or three days' supply of firewood, which we stored beneath an overhanging ledge of rock. There too we placed some dry punk, tinder, and birchbark in case our fire went out. Soon the sky became overcast with mackerel clouds, and the swallows flew so low that they scarcely skimmed the tree-tops. Bill said they were catching flies. The mosquitoes were now very annoying.

Bill had been so anxious to finish the fish barrier that he had not taken time to hunt for game, so we ate our fill of berries. During the night I heard rain. Day broke with a glorious dawn; and after visiting the snares we breakfasted on a couple of rabbits.

While Bill worked on the dam, we boys gathered poles and birchbark with which to make the fish trough; and then the old hunter showed us how to do it. Placing a couple of three-foot sticks on the ground about four feet apart, we laid close together and at right angles across them a number of five-foot poles, which we bound to the crossbars with willow bark. In like manner we formed the two perpendicular sides about a foot high, across the top of which we bound several bars to support the sides. Next we lined the trough with sheets of birchbark laid shingle fashion and tied them in place with green spruce roots split to the size of cord.

Then after Bill had bound one end of the trough to the center of a stout pole, we carried the whole affair out to mid-stream, and laid the pole end of the trough in the opening of a sluiceway that Bill had left in the dam, so that the pole rested horizontally against the inside of

the wall and thus prevented the force of the water from carrying the trough away. The pole then being adjusted to the proper height and secured with stones, the opening in the wall was filled up, so that the trough formed the only large opening through which the water could escape. When the trough was propped at the right angle, the water raced through it about ten inches deep and fell into the basket. Thus, when water and fish passed through the trough, the coarsely woven basket allowed the water to escape but imprisoned the fish.

At first Bill's intention was to leave the fish barrier to do its work unaided while we built the blind for caribou hunting, but needing food at once he led us ashore and up the valley for several hundred yards. Then wading down the creek toward the dam, we beat the water with long willow switches to drive the fish into the trap. It was fun for Link and me slashing about with our switches as we waded sometimes waist deep through cold water, or staggered over slippery stones, or crossed gravelly shoals where brook trout flitted about beneath long streaks of foam. When we reached the dam and examined the trap, what a reward we got! There were three large fish and a lot of small ones too including seven brook trout.

What a meal we had! Afterward the old woodsman showed us how to dry the rest of the fish and hang them on a pole which he wedged across the cave just below its ceiling. Then we all headed for the point where the caribou landed the night before. When we arrived Bill warned us not to cross the caribou tracks, as he was afraid that any deer coming that way might scent us,

as the wind had now swung round and was blowing from the northwest; so we kept southward of the trail.

Selecting a commanding spot, the old hunter began building an evergreen screen. In less than an hour we had completed the work—a screen of poles covered with evergreen brush. It was about twelve feet long by seven feet high. On returning to camp Bill practised with his bow, driving arrows into clumps of moss set upon bushes at various distances. And all the while I kept wishing some big game would come along and give him a chance to do some real execution.

That night, as twilight crept through the woods and we sat beside the fire, we watched bats circling about the trees or sometimes dipping down close to our heads.

“There must be a little cavern somewhere near, besides th’ ice cave we found to-day,” the hunter remarked. “For these bats live in caves, an’ they’ve come out now to feed, as they always hunt their food at dawn an’ twilight.”

“What do they eat?” I asked.

“Insects, my boy, an’ if you watch ’em you’ll see what wonderful skill they show in avoidin’ the branches o’ trees, even while in swiftest flight. Yet it’s so dark we can hardly see the bats. Some Indians claim that even a blinded bat has no trouble in keeping its proper course an’ avoidin’ every object. That seems to argue that the bat goes by a sense of feel. That it actually feels the presence of an object before it’s near enough to touch it.”

The hard work of building the dam and making the blind made me feel very sleepy, and I was quite ready to turn in soon after supper. When I awoke next morn-

ing I found Link sitting beside the fire. He informed me that Bill had been away nearly half an hour. But suddenly the old hunter returned and with suppressed excitement exclaimed:

“Quick—I’ve seen deer!”

Seizing his bow and quiver he hurried to gain the shelter of the trees on the point. Then we saw them too. Single file they were descending the game trail down the face of the rocky precipice. Apparently we managed to gain the shelter of the blind without being seen by the deer; and fortunately, too, the wind was in our favor. Now we had a good view of them as they zig-zagged back and forth among the scattered clumps of trees and bushes on the rocky wall. It seemed there were between twenty and thirty deer; near the foot of the trail we lost sight of them for a while in a clump of spruce. Later Bill whispered:

“Look! . . . the leader’s comin’ now!”

“Where? . . . I can’t see him,” Link replied.

“It’s not a him, it’s a her. Don’t you see her horns?” the old hunter corrected.

“Horns? . . . on a doe?” I questioned.

“Yes, caribou does have horns. But you keep still or you’ll frighten ’em.”

Now I saw the leader. She was emerging from the spruce grove. Cautiously she gazed around, just as a person would do who wished to advance unobserved. Then she stood as though searching the lake and opposite shore, looking straight at us, too, but apparently not seeing us or anything at which to take alarm. Then she retraced her steps to where the band stood waiting in the shelter of the trees. On being assured,



As she came abreast of us, not more than fifteen paces away, I was trembling with excitement, especially when I noticed that Bill was taking aim and pulling on his bow string until I thought it would break. Nearer came the deer. Suddenly the hunter let fly an arrow. It struck the doe with such force that the little shaft sank deep behind the shoulder and the startled creature leaped into the air.

as it seemed to me, that all was well, the deer now broke into a trot as they followed her down to the water's edge.

"I wish I'd had time to get a better willow thong," said Bill, as he laid his spear beside him in readiness for use. "The knife's not very secure, but I may not need to use it after all."

As I watched the oncoming deer, I could see that the leader of the band was a handsome creature with a much larger set of horns than the other does possessed. On entering the lake some of the deer swerved toward the north, as if seeking deeper water; and just before they settled down to swim they began thrashing it with their legs, making a noise not unlike the roaring of a rapid. Then, too, while they were swimming they made a noise not unlike the grunting of pigs. But most of the band waded straight across the rapids; and as they came ashore the old hunter restrung his bow and adjusted an arrow. On gaining the bank, the leader, glancing round a couple of times as if to make sure her charges were close behind, advanced up trail toward the blind, for it was there the bank could be most easily ascended.

"Now, boys . . . keep your eyes open . . . I'll try for the leader . . . if I get her . . . I'll have time to use more arrows," whispered old Bill.

Silently and motionlessly and breathlessly we waited. Cautiously the leader moved forward. As she came abreast of us, not more than fifteen paces away, I was trembling with excitement, especially when I noticed that Bill was taking aim and pulling on his bowstring until I thought it would break. Nearer came the deer. Suddenly the hunter let fly an arrow. It struck the doe

with such force that the little shaft sank deep behind the shoulder and the startled creature leaped into the air, then fell heavily upon the ground. Instantly the rest of the band halted, and staring for a few moments at their disabled leader they began trotting around in bewilderment. With wild eyes and dilated nostrils they tossed their heads, searching and scenting in every direction to discover where the hidden danger lay; but as our blind was thickly built, and as it also stood down wind, we were not discovered.

A moment later the old hunter, having strung another arrow, struck another deer, and as it stumbled a near-by doe took fright and galloped up the slope. Then, as if accepting her as their new leader, all the does and calves followed her. When Bill let fly his third arrow, it struck another doe, but did not bring her down, and at that instant Lincoln, overwrought with excitement, seized Bill's spear and, leaping out from behind the screen, hurled it, javelin fashion, with all his might at the escaping wounded caribou. The weapon struck the deer with considerable force, and for nearly fifty yards the shaft dragged behind the beast; then it dropped free, but left the knife embedded in the doe's flank. A moment later the deer, with Bill's knife, disappeared among the trees, and the old woodsman roared out in despair:

"Lord save us! We've lost our knife!" Angrily glaring at Lincoln, he growled: "What'd you throw it for?—you fool!"

"Just wanted to help."

"Help? You mean starve us to death!"

"But I'll get it again. I'll catch the caribou," Link replied.

"Catch that deer?—you'd no more catch a caribou than you'd catch an express train, unless it's mortally wounded," grunted the old man in angry derision. Then he exclaimed:

"Quick, we must follow—it's our only chance!"

Without another word he trailed the deer. Our chances of success seemed hopeless as we ran up the little valley between the hills, for now and again I would lose trace of the tracks. But the hunter, with eyes and ears alert, silently and swiftly followed the often invisible trail; then once more he would lead us to where the tracks reappeared, and I would marvel at his skill. The country through which we passed was fairly open, being covered only here and there with thick clumps of trees and bushes. It was then I noticed that the woodsman, instead of paying attention to the ground near his feet, focussed his gaze from ten to twenty paces ahead, where the pine needles, or the moss, or the grass, or the occasional outcroppings of rock caught the light at such an angle with the eye that he could detect wherever the slightest disturbance had taken place. In that way he followed the trail over the most delicate of mosses, that seemed little more than a rough, mottled coat of paint upon the weather-beaten stone. But we were following the main trail of the band; and it was only when Bill discovered blood upon overturned leaves that he was certain he was following the wounded deer. After an exhausting run of several miles, we came suddenly upon the disabled doe as she staggered up from behind a fallen tree where she had lain down to rest. Already she had grown weak, and though at first she tried to escape, she eventually wheeled about

and stood at bay when we drew near. Adjusting an arrow the old hunter bent his bow and let drive; but it took two to bring her down. Then, seizing his knife by the handle, he pulled it free and finished the deer.

"It's a long carry to camp, an' as there's one deer here an' two on the point, we'd best return an' dress those first; then we can take our time in carryin' this one home. For if I stopped to dress this one, somethin' might happen to th' others."

On returning to the two dead caribou Bill said:

"Now, boys, watch what I do, if you want to learn how to skin an' cut up deer." And then he added, as he turned one of the does over on its back:

"The two principal ways o' skinnin' animals are called 'case skinnin'' an' 'split skinnin'.' To case skin an animal the skin's cut down th' inner side of each hind leg until the two cuts meet under the tail. Then the pelt's peeled off by turnin' the skin inside out. Just as I showed you th' other day when skinnin' rabbits. All animals such as ermine, fox, fisher, lynx, marten, mink, otter, skunk, muskrat, an' rabbit are skinned that way. All animals such as wood buffalo, musk ox, moose, wapiti, caribou, deer, bear, beaver, wolf, an' wolverine, are split skinned. That's the way we're goin' to skin these does, by first cuttin' the skin down the belly from throat to tail; then down th' inside of each leg to the center cut. Then we'll peel the skin off both ways toward the back.

"An' while I think of it, I ought to tell you that all split skins are stretched on square-cornered frames, except beaver skins, which are stretched on oval frames. All case skins are stretched over wedge-shaped boards

o' various sizes. That is, all except muskrat skins, which are usually stretched over a hooped frame or a looped stick. These deer skins'll be stretched by lacin' 'em inside a frame made of poles. But boys, there's still another way to skin a big animal that's too heavy to turn over, an' that is to split the skin down the back an' then peel it off both ways toward the belly. It's a good thing for you boys to know that."

Meanwhile the hunter had bled and cut off the heads of both carcasses, and as the bodies had had time to stiffen sufficiently for convenient handling while removing the skin, he let us take turns in helping him by pulling back the skin, or even in occasionally handling the knife. When we had removed both skins, we set to work to disembowel the carcasses. It was certainly a messy job, but we had to learn how to play our part; otherwise, if we lost Bill Hill we'd never be able to work our way out to civilization.

Then the old woodsman cut out the ligaments extending along each side of the spine; for from them he intended making bowstrings and the thread with which we were to sew deerskins for winter clothing. Next he quartered the carcasses, then split them, and cutting the flesh free of the backbone, broke the ribs off close to the spine by bending them back and striking them with a heavy, sharp stone. Then he cut out the tongues, wrapped them up along with the hindquarters in the skins, bound the bundles with thongs of willow bark, and hung the remainder of the meat in the surrounding trees. After which we washed ourselves in the lake and then set off for camp, each carrying a load of meat.

It was some time after noon before we had our first meal

that day, and what an enjoyable meal it was, our first feed of caribou steak. We liked it better than beef. It was nearing sunset when the last of our caribou meat was stored in the ice cave. Then another big meal, and we went for a little stroll through the woods. Presently Bill, who was leading, stopped suddenly. He was watching something. Now we espied it too.

It was a bear. Although only about fifty yards away, it was unaware of us, as the evening breeze was in our favor. After pawing and scratching around, it laid a forefoot on a little mound, waited patiently for a while, then, without moving its foot, it began licking the back of its paw. Presently it clawed the earth again and then resumed its licking. I couldn't imagine what it was about, and curiosity almost forced me to whisper, but I dared not ask lest I frighten the brute. It fussed around the spot for ten or fifteen minutes before it finally wandered away. Then Link asked:

"What on earth was it doing?"

"Catchin' ants, my son."

On walking over to the spot, Bill showed us how the bear had been clawing about an ant hill in order to excite the ants and make them come out of their house. Then, when the bear would plant his paw on their home, the ants would excitedly run all over his foot, and he would lick them off. Thus he not only caught the ants, but he did it, too, without getting any dirt in his mouth.

"A bear often drinks the same way, especially when he thinks the water needs strainin'. He drinks through the hair on the back o' his paw."

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF BEARS

DON'T stop, Bill. Tell us more about bears. Last time you said there was a lot more we ought to know. You promised you would," Lincoln reminded him.

"My boy, you're right. There's not only a lot you should know, but a whole heap more I'd like to find out. That's why I never grow tired listenin' to Indians tell their huntin' stories. Yes, I'll tell you what little I know. But where did I leave off?"

"You told us about their life in spring and how they fish and fight, and about being right- and left-handed," I recalled.

"And what they eat," Link added.

"Oh, yes, I know now," the old hunter commenced. "And that reminds me that sometimes, when scoopin' for fish, the bear may slip off the rock an' get a duckin'. I've seen it happen. Th' one I saw looked mighty foolish, especially when he found there was another bear watchin' him. Bears make me laugh—they're so like men; an' men are just like boys. I never grow weary o' watchin' their antics."

"Whose? Boys'?" Link asked.

"No, men's," I answered.

"Bears'," corrected Bill.

"When a bear catches enough fish for a meal, he

doesn't at once go ashore to eat but seeks a sunny rock, shakes himself like a dog, an' dries off a while. Then he goes over an' eats the best he's caught. When he's had enough he'll shake himself again, an' gruntin' with satisfaction, he'll walk carelessly away, as much as to say: 'You other bears, or any other animals or birds, can now eat what I've left.' But when he returns next day he'll not eat what he left—not if the fishin's good. At that season o' the year he likes fresh fish an' seems to enjoy the sport of catchin' 'em. But at other seasons he'll eat rotten fish with relish. The bear's spring fishin' season lasts a couple o' weeks.

"Then, my boys, there's a season of about two weeks between the runnin' o' th' fish an' th' findin' o' th' first green things, durin' which time th' bear has to resort to whatever food he can find. It's at that time he leaves the rivers an' seeks higher ground, where he finds mice, lemmin', ground hogs, rabbits, or grouse. After two weeks or a month o' such huntin' his feet may be tender an' his claws worn down from diggin' for food underground. Next he feasts on green berries an' likes 'em so well it's apt to make him ill. Then he an' his companions may become so cranky from eatin' too much green fruit, that their band may disperse; though, of course, a mother an' her young cubs always stay together.

"After the green-fruit season the first berries to ripen are the lowland bearberries that grow on wet ground on separate stems. Though the bear likes 'em an' seems to thrive on 'em, no other animal cares to tackle 'em that I know of. It's claimed they're poisonous to man. Then there's the highland bearberry that grows on high



“The snare havin’ caught her about the head, had not strangled her to death, but had pulled her head aloft an’ held it there for many days. At first I thought she was dead. Later, I discovered she was still breathin’. I uncovered my gun to end her sufferin’, but the poor little cubs were too much for me. I decided to spare the mother for them. But how was I to let her go?”

bushes almost like willows; an' though man may eat 'em, he soon stops.

"In midsummer the bear turns mostly to eatin' fruit, an' feasts on bearberries, strawberries, Saskatoon berries, raspberries, crowberries, craneberries, blueberries, cranberries, an' currants. After a month of such feedin' he'll want to change his diet again, an' then for about a week he'll hunt for nothin' but ant hills—just as you saw him doin' to-night. Think of an animal as big as a bear—sometimes weighin' over five hundred pound'—bein' able to catch an ant. But now you not only know how he does it, but you've seen him do it, too."

Suddenly silence took possession of the old man, and his keen, steel-blue eyes, that had been constantly scanning the bay, became fixed upon a certain spot. Instantly fear held my breath, and as I glanced that way I expected to witness the return of the murderers. There, at a certain place on the water, ever-widening wavy rings were obliterating the reflections of the sky in the bay. What a tremendous relief! There a big fish had just leaped to catch a fly.

"Go on, Bill," Link coaxed.

"But where did I leave off?" the old man asked abstractedly.

"About bears catching ants," I prompted.

"Oh, yes, o' course," he resumed. "Now I remember what I was goin' to say: Until about the beginnin' o' June the bear's still carryin' his winter fur: an' wishin' to get rid of it he travels in a zigzag way all over the place. Ignorant white men'd say he was huntin'

grouse or rabbits or mice. But he's simply makin' use of every bush within his reach to comb his sides an' back to help pull off his winter coat. As soon as th' old matted fur's replaced by his new summer hair, he begins to fatten an' look quite slick. It's then he feels he ought to travel a bit to find a mate.

"So about the middle of June he becomes, as white men'd say, 'quite chesty.' If, when he finds a female, there's another male with her that he thinks he can master, he'll try to take her away from him. A fight may follow, an' if he's licked, he'll slink away an' try to find another female for a wife. As I said before, bears seldom fight to the death. An' when a desperate battle does ensue, it doesn't last long, not so much from terrific bitin' as from clawin' with all four feet.

"A bear at that season, bein' proud of his new coat, seldom climbs trees. But in July an' August he's often among th' upper branches o' big timber. Fishin' starts again about th' end o' August. When fish—brook trout, for instance—are workin' their way up stream they try for backwaters, but in rapids, there bein' few backwaters, the fish often head for eddies behind rocks. There they rest in one eddy while they're gettin' ready to try for another. It's then the bear has his chance. When bears fish in shoal waters, runnin' from three to six inches deep over stones, their antics are often very funny. By the way, white men often describe a bear as holdin' its food in its paws like a squirrel. But a bear usually puts its paw down on its food, especially when it's eatin' meat, an' chews an' tears away at it from under its paw."

As the old woodsman paused, Link asked:

“What do bears do next?”

“The seasons of matin’, of berryin’, an’ fishin’ bein’ over, the bear may choose the later kinds o’ food, such as cranberries an’ weedberries. The latter kind the bear sometimes finds by scraping away the snow. There’s still another berry or bud that’ll last him a long time, an’ that’s the bud o’ the rose after the petals’ve fallen. It’s sweet an’ good to eat. Then there’s th’ upland bearberry that lasts all winter. From its leaves, gathered in summer, the best of kinnickinick’s made. Kinnickinick is a substitute for tobacco.

“A bear’s den or wash depends on the nature o’ the country in which the bear lives. If winter overtakes him in a swampy region, he may den up in risin’ ground, or in a tree-crested mound, or inside a large moss- or grass-covered tussock. In any case his den’ll be cosy an’ dry. If winter overtakes him in a *brulé* country, he may find a fallen tree whose big upturned roots afford a cave beneath, an’ into it he’ll crawl.”

“What’s a *brulé* country?” I asked.

“A forest of burnt timber. My boy, a bear never digs a den if he finds one ready made. Neither do bears cuddle up together in a wash, like so many kittens in a basket. Each bear curls up by itself, as it likes plenty o’ room. Where a mother an’ two second-winter cubs ’re found in a wash, each has its own nest; an’ the leaves, workin’ up between the bears, form little walls that separate ’em. Two mothers with their cubs never live in a single den; each mother must have her own wash. Two or three young cubs may be found together, but never two full-grown males. They’d never agree. In hibernatin’, a bear usually turns his back to th’ en-

trance of his den an' sleeps with his head between his legs, while his nose may be covered with his flank.

"But speakin' of cubs reminds me of an experience I once had with a mother bear. It happened one mornin' in spring when some snow was still upon th' ground an' the trees was covered with hoar frost. While visiting my trappin' trail, I came to a fairly open space where I had set a bear snare among some birches. At first glance I could see that th' big tossin' pole had been sprung, an' on comin' nearer I saw that a big bear had been caught in the snare. It was a mother with two little cubs. Though they must have been starvin' for a week or more they were still alive an' cryin' about their mother. The snare, havin' caught her about the head, had not strangled her to death, but had pulled her head aloft an' held it there for many days. At first I thought she was dead. Later, I discovered she was still breathin'. I uncovered my gun to end her sufferin', but the poor little cubs were too much for me. I decided to spare the mother for them. But how was I to let her go? It was dangerous work. After thinkin' it over I got up in a slender tree—too small for her to climb—then I tried to cut the snare with a bullet from my gun. It was ticklish work; but the fourth shot severed the line an' the relieved mother sank down in a heap. For a while she didn't move. Later, the joy of her cubs seemed to bring her to, an' at last she got up an' shuffled away with her little babies crying affectionately on either side of her.

"Now, boys, that's enough about bears for to-night. I'll tell you more some other time. It's gettin' late. We better be turnin' in. But remember this: even a

wise man can learn a great deal from animals an' birds. If you're really in search of wisdom, study nature. Then you'll begin to read the great book our Good Friend has placed before us. Civilization an' folly have always been great chums. That's why I never visit cities now. For the more I learn of nature the more I reverence God."

Presently I began to yawn and nod, so lost no time in lying down, and the last thing I remembered seeing was a flickering, shadowy picture of a kindly old half-breed devoutly kneeling in an attitude of prayer. But the next thing I had awakened with a start, my hair almost on end. I had heard an awful noise. I leaped up and groped about, trembling with fear lest the others had vanished. Yes, Link was there. Then good old Bill spoke:

"It's a great horned owl killin' a rabbit. It was the rabbit that made the noise. Dumb at other times, the fear o' death at last made it scream. An' that bully o' the woods, the great horned owl, is eatin' it now. Do you see it there on th' upper tip of that broken rampike? Right up there against the sky."

Yes, I saw it. True, the great bird was eating something and every once in a while its big wings would outspread as it balanced itself on its towering perch.

"My boys, what are called rabbits in this country aren't rabbits at all. They're varyin' hares, though they're commonly called snowshoe rabbits on account of their remarkable large feet, which lets 'em travel easy over the deepest snowdrifts. The real rabbit burrows underground, while these varyin' hares don't. Their nests are usually on the ground in some sheltered

place beneath brushwood that forms a fair protection. Their nests are lined with leaves, grass, or their own cast-off fur. The reason they're called varyin' hares is that they wear a coat that changes color with the changin' seasons: brown in summer an' white in winter."

"Rabbits never put up much of a fight, do they?" Link asked.

"No. Of all th' animals in the woods the rabbit is the most harmless. Yet it's hunted more by beasts an' birds an' men than any other creature in the forest."

"Does a rabbit ever take to water?" I asked.

"Yes, an' he's a fair swimmer too, but he doesn't like it. Instead of divin' in like an otter when he takes to a stream, he jumps in like a lynx an' makes a great splash in his effort to keep his head from goin' under. If he stays in long his coat is apt to get water-logged. So his swimmin' is mostly confined to crossing little rivers, or even little lakes, in search of an island that will give him a better feedin' ground. While rabbits generally spend the day in sunnin' themselves or sleepin', they feed mostly at night specially when the moon is full. Then it is they're fattest. In daylight a rabbit seldom dares to cross an open space, or a frozen river, as he always wants to keep to cover. But at night he's a little braver. It's then that th' owl attacks him most; though th' other flesh-eatin' birds an' beasts are ever ready to catch 'im, day or night."

"There must be an awful lot of rabbits in this country," I remarked.

"Millions of them, my boy. It's the seventh year. The year of great plenty in the Northland," the old

woodsman replied. "Some places in these Northern woods'll be fairly swarmin' with 'em all winter long; an' other animals, such as foxes, lynx, an' wolves,'ll be plentiful, too, because they live on rabbits."

"What do you mean by the seventh year?" Lincoln inquired.

"The seventh year, my son, is, as I said before, the year of great plenty in the Northland. But, to be exact, the year of great plenty doesn't always fall on the seventh year; it may come in the sixth or th' eighth year. Rabbits are then swarmin' in the woods; but soon a sickness breaks out among 'em, an' before another winter it'll have almost wiped the rabbits out of existence. They get to have a swellin' throat an' sores in the groin an' under the leg pits.

"Durin' the next few years the females have unusually large families, the young numberin' even eight or ten, so in six or eight years the country is again overrun with rabbits. Then, once more, the plague appears, an' in a few months there is hardly a rabbit to be seen—unless they're already lyin' dead on the snow. During the next year or two there's far fewer animals that feed on rabbits, such as lynx, foxes, ermine, martens, minks, fishers, an' wolves. When rabbits are scarce, starvation stalks the woods, so you see we're lucky that this is the seventh year."

Early next morning we visited the snares and found two rabbits dangling there; and as we had no immediate use for more the old woodsman took up the snares. Then away we went to the creek to examine the fish barrier; and there we found nearly thirty pounds of fish in the basket; so the hunter set the basket ashore as

we did not need any more until we had a chance to dry or smoke the amount of food we had in store. After breakfast we built a rack upon which to hang the fish to be smoked. Then Bill showed us how to dress the fish for that work. By cutting into the back on either side of the spine, from gills to tail, he opened the fish and removed the bones and offal. Then on the inside he repeatedly slashed the thicker parts halfway through in order that the smoke might the more easily penetrate the flesh. This done, he hung the fish inside out upon the rack ready for smoking. When we had finished dressing all the fish, old Bill built beneath the rack a smouldering fire of dry rotten wood that made no blaze but much smoke; and around the rack he placed a brush screen to protect the smoke from the wind.

Next morning, a couple of hours after sunrise, Bill suggested our having a second breakfast. A few minutes later more caribou steak disappeared.

"But after this," the old hunter commented, "we must eat the bony parts first an' save the fleshy parts for the makin' o' dried meat to take on our outward journey."

The meal over, Bill Hill went up to the cave to examine the meat and skins. By standing on props set against the inner walls, he managed by jamming their ends into crevices of the rock to place several poles across the top of the cavern. Upon those poles he formed a rack, and upon the rack he placed the meat, out of reach of prowling animals.

"If anything can jump that high, we'll have to build a fence across the mouth of the cave, an' enter by a gate," the hunter smiled.

The next thing Bill did was to hang the skins over poles placed between trees, in order to prevent the "mack" or fat heating the skins and causing them to spoil, which might have happened had they been left folded up.

Then he set to work to make a bowstring of deer sinew. First he removed with the back of his knife all the flesh that adhered to the ligaments, then stretched them upon a pole where he left them to dry for an hour or so, away from the heat of the fire. After rolling and pounding the ligaments, he separated their fibres into the finest of sinew threads, which he made into a long cord by first twisting them tightly together by rolling them on his bare thigh with the flat of his palm. After this he stretched the cord between two saplings and left it there to dry.

He also showed us how to make thread for the sewing together of deerskins for our fall clothing by rolling and twisting the very finest of the separate fibers of deer sinew on our bare thighs and then tying a knot at one end of the thread and pointing the other end, so that when dry the point would be stiff enough to pass through the holes made in the leather with a bone awl. Thus no needle would be required.

"I'll make an awl for each of you, just as soon as I get time. Besides makin' clothin' for the comin' of winter, we must make deerskin sleeping robes that can also be used as wrappers to keep our stuff on our sleds when travellin' overland."

While pausing in our work to listen to the old hunter, a strange-looking mouse scurried by Link. It was

about five inches long and looked a grayish brown with a darker stripe down its back. When he drew Bill's attention to it, the hunter smiled.

"That the first you've seen? You boys must be short-sighted. The country's overrun with 'em. It's the Northern deer-mouse. You can find it almost anywhere in the woods. It doesn't hibernate. It hoards its food, principally seeds, in all sorts o' queer places. Its weather-proof nest is usually found in a hollow log, tree, or stump. Even in midwinter you may see its tiny tracks on the snow an' perhaps hear its gentle squeakin'. The hawks an' owls, as well as foxes, wolves, lynx, an' ermine, are always after it. There're other mice you'll see before long. They're called wolves—two kinds: the red-backed an' the brown. The red-backed are called gapper mice an' the brown are known as meadow mice. There're a lot of 'em, too, billions, I guess."

After lunch the old woodsman began making "jerked meat." Taking a thick piece of deer meat, he cut it in such a way that it opened into a strip about two feet long—just in the way that one opens a book of panoramic views.

"Th' Indian women are wonders at this work. They'd do it in half the time it takes me. Dryin' meat this way reduces its weight about one half an' lessens its bulk about two thirds. It makes it much easier to carry. Besides, it'll keep for months, if not packed too tight."

"How long will we have to smoke it?" Lincoln asked.

"Two or three days, to make a good job. Later on we may get enough ducks, an' geese too, to smoke 'em

also for our overland journey." Presently he added: "Look at those little beggars. You'd think they'd never eat their fill. They're Canada jays but mostly known as 'Whiskey Jacks.' Though th' word whiskey has nothin' to do with liquor. It's simply taken from th' name the Indians called 'em before th' white man came."

"It's too bad we boys haven't knives, too. If we had, we could help you a lot more," I remarked.

"Gordon, my boy, you won't have to wait long," Bill replied. "We can manage as th' Indians an' Eskimos do. They're never at a loss for knives. Usually they make 'em of native copper; it's found in many parts o' this country. But when they haven't copper, they take a piece of sandstone an' grind down the thin edge of a caribou rib until it'll serve for skinnin' or cuttin' meat. Or they split the shin bone of the foreleg of a caribou, which without even grindin' sometimes has an edge keen enough to cut meat."

That started us making shin-bone knives. For, after all, they were easy to make when one knew how. So when Bill split five or six of the shin bones with a heavy stone, he picked out the two best and broke them off to a handy length, and Link and I got to work. By supper time the cutting up of the meat was finished. While picking berries the hunter remarked:

"We must start dressin' the deerskins pretty soon; then, in our spare time, especially in th' evenin's when we're sittin' beside the fire, we can keep ourselves busy makin' moccasins an' clothin'."

"What style of a coat are you goin' to wear?" Link asked me. "A Tuxedo or a swallow-tail?"

"I'm not much of a tailor," the old woodsman smiled, "but I guess we can manage. If we make th' other halves of those shin bones into skin dressers by grindin' their ends into chisel points, we'll be able to remove the mack from th' inside of the skins. Then we can start tannin' 'em."

For some reason or other the flies were very bad around camp that evening, so we went for a walk just to get away from them.

"Darn these mosquitoes!" I exclaimed as I slapped my face. "Don't they ever stop biting?"

"All summer long we have 'em with us, my boy, an' they work both day an' night in relays, it seems. But deer flies—which many call bulldogs—bite only between sunrise an' sunset, durin' July an' August, while black flies appear toward th' end o' May an' stay until 'bout th' end of July. They're day workers too, but they bite worse at sunrise an' sunset than at noon. The sand fly, or the 'no-see-'ems,' hunt mostly at dawn an' twilight; seldom in the heat o' the day. They're found most in sandy places an' bite worse durin' damp weather. The smoke of a smudge fire helps drive mosquitoes an' black flies away, but a big open fire attracts sand flies so strongly that they can't keep from its flames. With the comin' o' frost all flies disappear. And that's when one may live happiest in the North-land."

The timber through which we passed was tall but not dense, and mostly composed of two kinds of spruce—black and white—as well as balsam poplars, paper birches, and aspens. Here and there were a few jack pines and tamaracks; while willows stood near the

water. Farther inland the tamaracks and jack pines grew more plentiful, and while the tamaracks were found mostly in marshy places, the jack pines often stood alone on rocky ground. Then again there were fairly open rocky ridges covered here and there with thick patches of moss or thin groups of trees.

Later, at early twilight, while we were on our way back, we caught sight of a handsome fox as it appeared on a ledge of rock. It saw us, too, and for several minutes stood poised like a statue with head up, ears pricked, and holding in its mouth a squirrel. Its beautiful coat was white and gray and red and black. So delighted were we with the sight—for it could not have been more than thirty paces away—that even Bill, though he held his bow in hand, refrained from molesting it.

“My boys, that was a cross fox. The real black fox is the most valuable, an’ the rarest of all foxes. The most perfect skins are generally those of large males. In fact, my father, who was a Hudson’s Bay factor, never saw the skin of a female that could be classed as a perfect black fox. Yet he was for years stationed at Fort Smith on Great Slave River, one of the best black- an’ silver-fox regions in Canada. For there, in one year, he handled ninety-six black- an’ silver-fox skins. Yet, strange to say, some of the best silver-fox skins were those of females. Out of that lot of ninety-six skins there were only nine that could be classed as real black foxes.

“Fox skins run about one black to fifteen silver, one silver to twenty cross, an’ one cross to twenty red. The fur o’ the so-called black fox is a very dark slaty blue, an’ both th’ inner an’ outer hair is of that color.

Every black or silver fox is marked with a white spot on the breast an' a white tip on the tail. The smaller the white markings, the higher the skin'll grade—that is, providin' there're no other white hairs upon the skin. If other white hairs, called guard hairs, show, then it's classed as a silver fox."

For a while the old woodsman was silent, and Link asking why, he replied:

"My boy, it's hard to talk when we're walkin' single file. At least, if I talk loud enough for the last man to hear we'll be makin' too much racket. We'd better wait until we get home. Otherwise we'll scare everythin' away an' spoil our chances of seein' game."

Sure enough, when we got back to camp and were comfortably settled beside the fire, Lincoln kept the old hunter to his word by saying:

"Tell us more about foxes. You said you would."

"You're awful boys," old Bill smiled. "You never let th' old man rest. I feel as though you were turnin' me into a talkin' machine. But I guess you need it all. For you're certainly pretty green. I sometimes wonder what city boys ever learn. Well, to go back to foxes—I'll tell you somethin' th' Indian hunters believe.

"They believe that the purer a black fox grades, the rounder its tracks, an' while the tracks of the cross fox are less round, the tracks of the red fox're even more oval. They also claim there's another peculiarity about the black fox, an' that is: if it's not frightened or is not caught the first time it comes in contact with a trap, it will, after that, be easily caught. But if nipped only once by a trap, it'll then be almost impossible to catch a black fox. For under such circumstances it's much

harder to catch a black fox than a red fox. My father, dur n' his lifelong experience as a fur trader, found three black-fox skins with only about a dozen white hairs in the tip o' the tails an' on the breast, yet never once did he see a black-fox skin without white hairs."

"Then how would you describe a perfect silver-fox skin?" I asked.

"My son, a perfect silver-fox skin must contain nothin' but black an' white hair. For if the slightest tinge o' yellow or red is seen, it's then graded as a cross-fox skin. The more white hairs found in a silver-fox skin, the more it loses in value. The more black hairs, or the larger the cross on a cross-fox skin, the greater its value. The more yellow or red hairs take the place o' white, the more it lessens in value. The cross-fox skins found in various parts o' Canada run all the way from black to white with brown, red, an' yellow intermixin' in a handsome way. But all fox skins of lighter colors show, more or less, a dark cross on the back. Yet, remember, my boys, I'm speakin' only of the foxes of the Great Northern Forest.

"Say, boys, don't you think that's enough for to-night? I feel pretty sleepy an' a lot more like turnin' in than I do like talkin'. Besides, to-morrow'll soon be here. That reminds me. To-morrow I must look about for big pine or birch trees an' decide which kind of a canoe it'll be easiest for us to build. It'll depend entirely on the trees we find in the next few days. We may even have to travel southward to get the kind I want. It'll take a pine about eighteen inches thick to furnish a sheet o' bark large enough to make a canoe of thirty-inch beam. An' when you take into considera-

tion that it ought to be about eighteen feet in length, without knots, our chance of findin' one that size is mighty slim.

"But a pine-bark canoe's easily made, by simply foldin' up an' sewin' together th' ends o' the sheet to make bow an' stern. It's a clumsy craft, though, an' not adapted to rapid travellin'. So I'm countin' more on a birchbark canoe. Though we're almost on th' edge of the range of canoe birch trees, I believe we may find some o' fair size if we travel south for a day or two. That's somethin' we ought to settle to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII

THE WAY OF FOXES

NEXT morning I was up even before Bill Hill, and while he kindled the fire he asked me to go to the cave and bring down some meat for breakfast. It was a cool morning; the mist hung so thick in the valley that even the big rock was veiled from view, and the trees and bushes were drenched with dew. I was hurrying along, care-free, as I entered the little grove of evergreens. The cave was now in view. But the next instant I stopped dead in my tracks. I saw something! . . . Silently wheeling about, I lit out for camp as if all the animals in the forest were after me and fairly flew among the trees. When I tried to dive into the lean-to the rock hit me so hard I could only gasp out two words:

“Bear! . . . Cave! . . .”

Seizing his staff, the old hunter bound his knife to it as he ran. Cautiously he entered the grove. The bear was still there, his back toward us, and eating something on the floor of the cave. Silently old Bill approached, spear in hand, and pausing behind the bear spoke to him. With a startled grunt the bear swung round, rose on his haunches, and posed in an attitude to receive attack. But only for a moment. Then he changed his mind. Suddenly dropping upon all fours and swerving aside, he sailed out of the cave at such surprising speed

that it made me think of a big bundle of black bed-clothes shot from a cannon. And the way he seemed to soar through the landscape, touching only the high spots here and there with his toes, fairly took my breath away.

Though we had no bear steak for breakfast we did have a good bear talk; and among other things the old hunter told us was how in his younger days he had hunted grizzlies with the Stony Indians in the Rocky Mountains. It was the custom of those Indians to use a steel-bladed spear in the killing of grizzlies. The spear was made by fastening a "dag"—a big broad-bladed hunting knife—upon the end of a six-foot staff. He further explained that such a method of hunting and killing grizzlies did not display unusual bravery, but merely a thorough knowledge of the ways of bears. Every Indian hunter was well aware that when a bear turned to attack, or to receive attack, he would always rise upon his hind legs before striking. Therefore the hunter merely took advantage of this knowledge; and the moment the bear rose upon his haunches and poised himself in readiness to strike, the Indian would leap forward within a spear's length of the beast, drop upon his right knee, plant the butt of his spear on the ground beneath his left foot, and slant the point obliquely toward the heart of the brute, while the hunter would lean back as far as he could without letting go his lance. The bear, taking the weapon to be a harmless stick, would drop upon it in his effort to reach the Indian, and by his own weight drive the spear into his body. Then the hunter would leap aside and either hamstring the

bear with his small hunting ax or shoot him with his muzzle-loading gun.

"But what surprised me," remarked Link, "was the way that bear tore through the air when you were all ready to puncture him with your spear. He didn't act a bit like the bears in books."

And I added: "But, Bill, you never finished telling us about bears, and you promised you would." So while eating our breakfast he regaled us with a lot more facts about them.

"Bill, how could Gord or I tell a bear's den?" Lincoln asked.

"My boy, if you came upon a bear's den in winter time, and if there was a bear inside, the chances are you'd see hoar frost or icicles on the lower branches of an overhangin' tree, or on the twigs of near-by bushes. Th' icicles would be formed by the bear's breath risin' from an air hole. But even if you boys passed such a spot an' didn't see it, you might hear it."

"Hear it?" I laughed.

"Yes, hear it. That's if there was a breeze. Because the least wind would make th' icicles tinkle like little bells. Then you'd realize that for some reason or other that spot was different from the rest o' the woods. An' wonderin' why, you'd investigate the cause. At least, you would if you were a good hunter.

"When an Indian finds icicles or hoar frost about th' entrance to a bear's den, he listens carefully to hear if snorin' tells him the bear's asleep. If so, the hunter may shove in his arm or crawl inside an' feel about to locate the bear's head. If the position of the head pre-

vents him from shootin' th' animal behind th' ear, he'll then dig down into the den from a point over the bear's head. A bullet behind th' ear an' the bear stretches out dead.

"In late fall or early spring a hunter's careful how he tackles a bear in his den. He may not be sound asleep. If he's awake, th' Indian'll bar the hole with three poles the thickness of a man's arm. Two of 'em will be crossed like an X in front of th' entrance while the third is jammed straight down to block the hole. Hearing the noises outside an' seein' the sticks there, the brute may become annoyed. On tryin' to come out the beast'll thrust his head between the sticks, an' pushin' hard to force them aside the bear may jam fast. The hunter, standin' above the hole, then makes use o' his ax, an' splits the bear's skull between th' eyes.

"If a hunter finds a bear in his den, an' th' entrance admittin' light, an' should he be without gun or ax, he'll block all light from the hole before he goes for his gun. Because, if left in total darkness the brute'll lie still for some time. But if light is admitted, it'll become restless an' come out. A good hunter always takes advantage o' his knowledge of animal ways.

"If he finds a bear awake in his den an' he doesn't want to pack the bear's meat all the way to his distant camp, he may move his camp to the bear's den. But first he'll take care to see that no light is enterin' the den, as total darkness may keep the bear there for several days. A good hunter can also tell without lookin' in, or puttin' his hand in to feel, how many bears may be in the den. He does it by listenin'. One bear may snore, another grunt, or, as many bears do, a

third may whistle in his sleep. A keen hunter can also tell their ages fairly well by the volume o' their breathin', just as easily as he can tell the size o' the largest bear by the size of th' entrance he made to his den."

"Do Indians use dogs for hunting bears?" Link asked.

"Yes. Dogs have better scent an' hearin' than men. But in winter, when the snow's deep, dogs may have a hard time findin' a bear's den unless there happens to be a crust on the snow, which allows 'em to move about much easier. A bear doesn't wander far from his den—seldom more than ten miles—even when lookin' for a mate. He frequents the same den every winter unless driven away by wolves, fire, or man. Bears prefer to hibernate in certain localities. The wise hunter, bein' well informed, knows where to look for 'em in winter. They're found in hillsides, cut-banks, hollow stumps or logs or trees—usually in the vicinity o' rapids that form good fishin' places or near big berry patches. The good hunter knows from year to year where game's most abundant on his huntin' grounds.

"In th' early winter or in th' early spring, while the ground or snow's still frozen, if the bear's been disturbed or driven from his wash he'll not wander far—for two reasons. His feet, when travelin' on frozen ground, are almost as tender as a man's; an' a cold snap may overtake 'im while away from his shelter. In that case he may pull together a few branches or leaves an' curl up on them to sleep; while new snow may fall upon him and turn him into a white-capped mound. But while that's true, it rarely happens.

"Do hunters ever call bears the way they do moose?" I asked.

"They sometimes call bears, not by imitatin' the call o' the mate, but by imitatin' the cry o' the cub. One way a bear is different from other animals is that when he comes to a small tree, instead o' walkin' round it, he may bend it down an' walk right over it, with the little tree between his legs. Perhaps because he likes to feel the twigs combin' his long hair. He also likes to walk up an' down slantin' trees. That bein' his habit, the hunter'll stand a good chance o' catchin' a bear if he sets a trap at the foot of a slantin' tree. Often, too, a bear'll climb stumps ten to twenty feet high; an' there he'll sit an' look around as though he was enjoyin' the scenery.

"Now, my boys, the sun's gettin' up, so I must cut short my talk on bears with just a few more words. So pay attention to what I say, as it's about trackin' bears. In the deep, soft snow of early winter, a bear leaves a clear track. If it freezes in that condition, notwithstanding that the later snows of midwinter cover it completely, it'll again show up next spring. It's then that it requires a wise hunter to tell the age of that track. But if the hunter examines everythin' carefully an' contrasts all surroundin' conditions, he may be able to tell when it was made.

"Though the hunter may have passed a certain spot many times durin' the winter without seein' any sign o' tracks on account o' deep snow, when mild spring weather causes the snow to thaw rapidly the tracks will reappear. First they are visible as shallow hollows in the snow, scarcely larger than the bear's paws, an' so

delicate in depth that you can hardly see 'em. Then a little later the surroundin' snow may thaw to the same level, an' the tracks disappear. Later still the surroundin' snow may thaw even lower than the packed snow of the tracks, leavin' the footprints elevated because the snow beneath 'em is also packed. An' even later still, if the thaw continues, the soft surroundin' snow may disappear so rapidly that the hard-packed footprints may remain standin' like very large, ill-shaped mushrooms, six or eight inches above the level o' the surroundin' snow. It's an odd sight.

"In spring, on account of his tender feet, a bear's travelin' is very limited. It's then, too, he doesn't like climbin' trees. But should a hunter trail a bear at that time, the brute's likely to do one o' two things: climb a tree or try to return to his wash. In either case it means his death.

"Now, boys, to work," ordered the old hunter as he arose. "The first thing we've got to do is to find birch-bark for our canoe."

Taking a small supply of partially dried meat, we started southward. An unusual number of wild fowl were passing overhead, and Bill Hill told us that we would soon see great flocks of swans, geese, and ducks flying southward from their breeding grounds, which of course lay all about us, even our little lake being here and there fringed with discarded feathers from molting geese and ducks. But for some reason or other we had only seen a few of the birds about our bay. Perhaps underwater food was not so plentiful there.

Ascending the southwestern slope, we at first passed through a fairly dense woodland. Then, off and on, we

came upon places where clumps of stunted spruces and twisted jack pines were scattered among outcroppings of rock. Later we encountered several swamps that compelled us to make détours. Next we passed over a big hill, the southern slope of which supported heavy timber; and it was down near a little lake that we entered a beautiful grove of birches. Most of the white trees were standing in groups of from three to eight or nine, and some of their trunks were unusually large for that part of the country. But we had to search some time before we could find trees of a suitable size, whose trunks were free from limbs and knots.

Choosing one of the finest and largest, the old woodsman began to skin its trunk by first cutting the bark free a little above the ground, and then cutting it again as high as he could reach while standing on a prop. Next he severed the bark vertically by cutting away a ribbon of bark about an inch wide. That was done so that he might use a large wooden chisel to remove the bark from the tree without damaging the edges of the bark. Owing to the lateness of the season the bark was much harder to remove than it would have been in the month of May, when the sap would be running.

Thus it took quite a time to gather all the bark we needed for our canoe. I noticed that Bill rolled the sheets of bark the narrow way and bound the bundles with willow-bark thongs. Then he made tump-lines of the same, in order that we could carry the rolls of bark upon our backs.

In returning to camp we deviated somewhat to avoid trouble in carrying our awkward loads among the close-



“Later still the surroundin’ snow may thaw even lower than the packed snow of th’ tracks, leavin’ the footprints elevated because the snow beneath ’em is also packed. An’ even later still, if the thaw continues, the soft surroundin’ snow may disappear so rapidly that the hard-packed footprints may remain standin’ like very large, ill-shaped mushrooms, six or eight inches above the level of the surroundin’ snow.”

standing trees. True, we made slower time, but the going was easier. While passing a small lake we came upon a tundra, or mossy area that resembled a large meadow, and on closer inspection its light green surface was found to be dotted here and there with patches of cranberries, raspberries, and Indian tea. Of the latter we gathered a quantity, especially the blossoms, for they make better tea than either the leaves or stems. It was Bill's intention to dry the tea on returning to camp and infuse it as a beverage.

On leaving the tundra we heard a great chattering of birds that kept repeating *ze ze ze, ze ze ze*. Our interest was sufficiently aroused for us to put down our loads and go in search of them. We found two or three hundred beautiful little birds all clustered on a single birch, perched close together in rows upon its branches. They were handsome little brown creatures with long, pointed crests upon their heads, and Bill told us they were Bohemian waxwings; shy little fellows that breed far to the North and roam about in a most irregular way in flocks of several hundreds. While we ate our supper they continued to delight us with their happy chattering, and just before we made ready to start, the whole flock took flight together and with a swish of fluttering wings passed southward.

Later we stopped beside a spring and noticed many deer tracks about the place. The old hunter called it a "salt lick," as there was much salt crusted about the spring, and he claimed that that was the reason so many deer had been there. The discovery pleased him and he carried away enough salt to last for weeks. He also

told us that we needn't worry much about running short of food, as he could always count on getting some deer there within a very few days.

It was shortly after we left Salt Spring that we boys saw for the first time a porcupine. It was so remarkably tame that we almost stumbled over it as it rested on the ground.

"What a curious looking brute!" Link exclaimed.

"It seems as if it couldn't move," I added, as I touched it with a stick.

"It's not much of a traveler; but I'd be careful not to let your hand get in the way of its tail, or you may get a few quills," the old man cautioned.

It was a thick-set brute, weighing about twenty pounds, and at a distance we might have taken it for a bear cub as it lay there all in a heap. When we began questioning Bill about the strange beast, he replied:

"My boys, the Canada porcupine's a very local animal, an' if it's got plenty o' food, it'll remain in one locality for months. Its food is chiefly the bark an' twigs of jack pines, hemlocks, birches, an' poplars, an' it much prefers second-growth jack pines from four to twelve feet high that may be found in a burnt-over country. The porcupine's one o' the most inoffensive of all animals, an' no one should kill a porcupine unless he's greatly in need o' its meat. The young are born in spring, an' their home may be in a burrow beneath the roots of a tree, or a rock, or in a hollow tree or log, an' their nest usually's made o' soft, dry grass. The porcupine's a cleanly animal, but a regular glutton to eat when food's plentiful; an' it affords the hunter many a good meal, as its flesh tastes like a cross between veal

an' chicken. Its fat, when melted, supplies a very soft grease something like vegetable oil.

Usually the porcupine's found in numbers from two to six or so, an' though in some parts o' the north it's scarce, they're very plentiful in the Isle à la Crosse district. There, in my younger days, I once saw over a hundred in a grove of ten-foot jack pines. They were strippin' the trees bare of bark an' twigs as they slowly moved along. Though its forefeet are supplied with long claws, the porcupine uses them much as a monkey uses its hands. He can climb out on a very slender branch an' nibble away, though the branch may curve so low that it turns the brute upside down. He is so fond o' salt that he'll enter a tent or house for the sake o' gnawin' a board, shelf, or table on which salt pork has left a briny taste.

"The porcupine never appears to make use o' its hearin' or its scent, an' its sight seems very defective. For instance, hunters can go up to within six or eight feet of a porcupine an' stand there smokin' their pipes an' talkin' an' laughin' an' the brute may not show in any way that he even suspects their presence—just as you saw a few moments ago. Yet another porcupine may take alarm when a person is thirty or fifty feet away an' chatter its anger before it waddles under cover of stump or log or a deserted shanty. Remember, boys, when you see a porcupine in a tree, don't climb up to get a nearer view, as he is apt to start down hind quarters first to meet you halfway. If his swishing tail happens to hit you, many barbed quills will remain in your flesh an' give you great pain, even if they don't make you ill. My boys, though I'm tryin' to teach you

the ways o' the woods, I sometimes feel I'm talkin' too much. As a rule, the more men talk, the less they say. Our Good Friend gave us two eyes and two ears but only one mouth, an' we ought to govern ourselves accordingly."

It was nearing sunset when we arrived at camp tired and hungry; we didn't waste much time before we turned in that night.

In the morning the old woodsman prepared a place for the building of our canoe. First he drove in two principal stakes at a distance of about eighteen feet apart—the length of the canoe to be—then connected them with two rows of smaller stakes, diverging and converging, so as to form the shape of the canoe; the two rows of stakes being about a yard apart in the center, so as to allow for the width of the canoe.

For a number of days—I've forgotten how many—we worked from early morning until late at night, sewing bark, shaving gunwales, splitting sheathing, and cutting ribs. The best pieces of bark, which had been soaked in the lake for a day, we overlapped together and double stitched with split, water-soaked spruce roots until a large sheet of bark was made. This was placed between the two rows of stakes, with the inside of the bark down. The well-soaked sheathing and ribs were next put in place, and as soon as the latter were loaded with stones, the bark assumed its proper form. Then the pine gunwales were bound into position and the pine ribs and birch thwarts adjusted. Thus the work upon the canoe progressed.

When weary of our task we turned to other things for a change, spending some time in hunting deer, or in

shooting water fowl, or in dressing skins, or in sun-drying berries and currants spread upon deerskins, or in making articles that would be needed for our trip, such as clothing, bags, paddles, arrows, tump-lines, and a tracking line for the hauling of the canoe up swift waters.

But the work that Link and I disliked most was the dressing of deerskins. It seemed such an endless job. After removing the "mack" or fat, and while the skins were stretched on rectangular frames by lacing them to the poles, Bill cut off the hair with his knife; and we scraped both sides with the bone dressers to remove the remaining mack, as well as the outer skin. When that was done we had to take the skins from the stretchers and work them over a stump to soften them. On lacing them back again into the frames, we rubbed the insides of the skins with the animal's brains, letting them soak in for three or four days. Next we had to soak the skins in water for at least two days. Then we would stretch them again to dry. After once more going over them with our bone dressers we removed them from the frames, worked them in our hands, and pulled them between us. Finally we smoked them over a fire of green pine cones, which gave them a rich tan color and an agreeable smell. The old hunter told us that if they afterward became wet, the smoking would prevent them from drying as hard as they otherwise would.

"That's the regular Indian way," Bill said, "an' it makes beautiful leather for moccasins or clothin'. But when they wish to dress a skin with the hair on, they don't soak it in water. Remember, my boys, it's easier to dress deerskins in winter, as the cold weather helps

the scrapin'. But leather made o' summer skins lasts longer; for while in winter pelts the roots o' the hair reach only a little below the surface, in summer skins the roots run through the pelt. So if we can kill enough caribou I want to make plenty o' moccasins durin' the next few weeks to last us for the whole o' our overland trip next winter. The first clothin' to make will be hairless deerskin smocks an' hip-high leggin's for early winter. Then we must provide caribou robes for beddin'. I need a deerskin quiver for my arrows, as this birchbark one makes too much noise for huntin'."

"I wish I had a bow and arrows," I remarked.

"Both you boys must have 'em right away an' get busy too learnin' how to use 'em. You must learn how to be self-supportin', for just as soon as we start to travel up the big river we can't count on anything. Any one of us, or all of us, may be killed any day. O'Brien an' his gang would shoot us an' think nothin' of it. We must always keep 'em in our mind, or we'll be caught unawares. No doubt they're on their way back now. Remember, the rivers form th' highways of this country. Trippers have to use 'em same as townspeople use streets. That's why we're apt to run into O'Brien an' his gang, no matter if they're ahead or behind us."

One morning we discovered there were thousands of ducks crowding the little bays along the western shore on the north side of the point, so Bill decided to try for a few. At first he found them out of range, so concluded to wait for a better chance rather than run the risk of losing his arrows. We loafed along the shore watching them.

"What kind are they?" Link asked.

"But there's different kinds," I volunteered.

"Those over there—those that're goin' '*whew whew*, *whew*' as they swim an' feed—they're baldpates," the old hunter explained as he pointed in their direction. "Listen—do you hear that '*peep, peep*'? That's a teal. There, see it? Listen—hear that other call? That '*kaow, kaow*.' It's made by the female baldpate. Look—see her over there?"

"Where do they nest?" Link asked. But old Bill, being intent on something else, seemed not to hear. So I replied with the smile of the well-informed:

"Where do you suppose? Don't you know that all ducks nest on the ground?"

"You're wrong again," the old woodsman replied as he turned to me. "The wood duck lays her eggs in a hollow tree or stump an' sometimes many feet from the ground."

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Link, "why, there's a lot of our canvasback ducks from America. I didn't know they ever came up here in Canada, so far from their home."

"My son, how American you are—claimin' everythin' that even visits th' United States," smiled old Bill. "Home is where you're born, especially if you never miss livin' there a part o' every year. Nearly all the wild fowl that live in North America are born up here, an' they never miss a single year in returnin' to their Northland home. Here's where their young are born. An' so it has been goin' on for thousands—yes, an' perhaps millions o' years. An' the same thing applies to most all other kinds o' North American birds."

Later, walking northward, we followed the shore

around a marshy inlet, and there we came suddenly upon a red fox devouring a duck. As quick as lightning the old hunter let drive an arrow. The fox leaped into the air and fell—as I thought, dead. But old Bill said, “No, he’s only stunned.” Then he turned it over and pressed his moccasined foot down upon the body for a while. As he skinned the fox he told us why he did this.

“Remember, my boys, the best way to kill a furbearin’ animal, especially if it’s been caught in a trap, is to strike it on the snout close to th’ eyes to stun it. Then, with the knee or the moccasined foot, bear down over the heart until the pressure stops the heart from beatin’. Thus the skin’s never injured.” Then he continued telling us about fox skins:

“The trader can best judge the value of a skin by lookin’ at th’ inside. The roots o’ the hair never show through on th’ inside of a prime skin; but on an unprime skin they may be seen on the inside. A prime skin is one that has been taken at the right season o’ the year when the fur’s in first-class condition. That is why most trappers stretch their fox skins inside out. It’s generally about th’ end o’ March that the roots begin to show on th’ inside o’ the skin, an’ then, too, the fur’s growin’ poor, as the foxes are then doin’ much runnin’ about among bushes an’ wearin’ their hair off. The best skins are well furred from feet to neck. In fact, a fox with a valuable coat looks as though it had on leggin’s. In its prime, th’ inside o’ the skin resembles partly transparent tissue paper.

“The best traders take great pride in bein’ able to name the date th’ animal was killed by simply lookin’ at th’ inside o’ its skin. There are two ways to tell if

the skin was taken in February or March. For then the sun's growin' stronger an' there're two ways the hair'll show it. First, the tips o' the guard hairs'll be slightly bleached, an' if you look at 'em with a magnifyin' glass you'll see that a tiny bulb has formed upon each tip. Second: the fox then suns himself a good deal, lyin' in the warmth o' the sun until his under hair often freezes to the snow, an' in gettin' up some o' the hairs're pulled out or broken off. This causes the fur to look slightly uneven.

"Foxes mate in February an' March, an' the young are born about seven weeks later an' strongly resemble house kittens. Their home is in an underground burrow, an' the father brings food to the mouth o' the den to help feed the family. The fox has such a keen sense o' scent that he can find an' dig out a nest o' hibernatin' mice even though the snow may be a foot deep. In the same way he can detect grouse or ptarmigan sleepin' beneath the snow, into which the birds had dived headforemost at sunset to escape the increasin' cold o' comin' night.

"Now, listen, my boys. The bite of a fox is one of the most dangerous bites that a trapper may get, as blood-poisoning may set in, an' festerin', or even lock-jaw may follow. The fox is a treacherous animal, as you can never count on him. Foxes, like most other animals, haunt salty ground, such as deer licks or salt springs. That's why the regions around Great Slave Lake an' Great Bear Lake are such good fur districts, as there are numerous salt springs in that country."

"What kind are the biggest foxes?" I asked.

"The largest foxes, my boy, are the males o' the

black an' red. Then comes the males o' the silver an' the cross. Then the females of the blue an' white. The smallest of all Canadian foxes are the kit-foxes o' the prairies."

"What do foxes mostly eat?" inquired Link.

"They live on flesh, fish, or fowl, but mostly upon grouse, rabbits, an' mice. In huntin' grouse that are sleepin' in the snow, the fox leaps three or four feet into th' air, an' comes down snout an' forepaws together in order to force his way suddenly through the snow an' pounce upon his prey. In that way he may kill several birds out of a single covey, or if th' others haven't been disturbed, he may turn up early next mornin' for another feed. The fox's also an eater of eggs, an' will even carry eggs in his mouth without breakin' 'em, as I've found egg shells in foxes' dens. When a fox is huntin' water fowl it may happen that a duck is sittin' upon her nest, an' rather than leave her eggs to the mercy of the fox she may put her head under her wing an' close her eyes to try an' persuade herself that she is safe because she no longer sees the fox. An' the fox will creep up to within six feet an' then spring upon her, an' thus secure a duck as well as a nest of eggs for his family's dinner.

"By the way, boys, the foxes livin' about big lakes often have the best coats, as they then travel most upon open expanses o' frozen water, instead o' brushin their coats against trees an' bushes. Besides, the fox is a great night traveler, as the rabbits are feedin' then, an' the grouse an' ptarmigan are sleepin' beneath the snow, where they're easier prey than they would be in the daytime. The only time a fox chooses to travel in

a heavy storm is when something has frightened him—maybe the crashin' of a tree that the storm has thrown down. Or he may be lookin' for better shelter. About th' only animal that seems to enjoy travelin' in a storm is the wolverine, perhaps because he then hopes to find other animals off their guard an' thus an easier prey to him.

"It's time we were gettin' back, but when I see Gordon scratchin' himself the way he's doin' now, he not only reminds me o' somethin', but he's makin' his mosquito bites much worse."

"What does he remind you of?" I asked.

"He reminds me that foxes are always troubled with fleas. An' if you're a keen observer you'll find that fox fleas are smaller an' smarter than the fleas that pay so much kindly attention to the lynx."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAY OF BEAVERS

NOW for a number of days we spent most of our time at work on our canoe, but when we grew tired of one job we turned to another. Every day old Bill taught us something new, either in the way of woodcraft or natural history, and every day, too, we grew more fond of our life in the North Woods. What with our daily work, and the surprises and adventures it often brought us, so much of interest was crowded into our lot that neither Link nor I had time to think of the life we had left in civilization, or to brood over the catastrophe that had befallen Perkins and his party. Every day seemed to bring us more contentment and pleasure, and thus we boys were as happy as any boys could be who were living a life of adventure in an enchanting and mystery-haunted forest.

One evening after supper Link said:

"Bill, you've told us a lot about other animals but nothing about beavers. I've heard they're about the most interesting animals in the North Woods."

"That's true, Link. An' here they're right at your very door, yet neither of you boys've had courage or ambition enough to do a little investigatin' on your own account. I sometimes wonder what boys are made of nowadays. Any night you want to you can slip over to Beaver Creek an' watch 'em. They may

be workin' every night now. Perhaps the newly-weds've started buildin'. Or some old one may be doin' a bit o' work on the dam. An' when you go over there, stay quiet, an' keep down wind, an' only move when they're not lookin' your way. You boys ought to be good at spyin' on animals, because you've less bulk an' better sight than ole Bill. I'll take you over an' leave you there."

We struck the creek just below the dam, and that was the first thing Bill explained to us.

"They built it to raise the water o' the stream high enough to protect their island-like homes by coverin' th' entrances to their lodges; also to form enough water below the winter's ice to allow o' swimmin' to the grub cache, as well as to flood the little valley until the water reached the surroundin' poplars, so that after cuttin' 'em down, they'd float 'em to their lodges."

"But how on earth did they build a big dam like this?" Lincoln asked. "It must be seventy or eighty feet long and at least five feet deep in the middle."

"They began by cuttin' brush an' layin' it in the water, butts up stream. On the brush they placed mud an' sod an' stones, or any handy stuff that'd weigh the brush down and help block back the water. That's the way the work went on, until finally it raised the water as high as they wanted it. But this isn't a big dam. Sometimes they build 'em hundreds o' feet long."

"I've heard they dig canals, too," I remarked.

"I haven't seen any 'round here," Bill replied. "If I had I'd show you one. They're usually dug for the purpose o' floatin' home the branches they've cut from trees beyond the reaches of their pond. Some of their canals are even provided with several little dams for

the purpose o' raisin' the water to a number o' different levels.

"The canals are from two to three feet wide an' about eighteen inches deep an' sometimes run for hundreds of feet. Now, I'm goin' to leave you boys here to do a little scoutin' of your own. Don't stay too late, an' when you get back to camp I'll be glad to hear what you've seen."

But after remaining a dark hour or two, and hearing nothing but an occasional noise that nearly frightened the life out of us—it sounded as if a moose had jumped off a hill into the water—we decided to go home. On the way Link twisted his ankle, and soon after arriving at camp it began to swell badly. Though the old hunter looked worried he merely remarked:

"I'll be back in a little while."

About a quarter of an hour later he returned with some branches of dwarf juniper. How he found them in the dark was a mystery to me. Breaking off the tips of the twigs in lengths about three inches long, he peeled off the outer bark; then with his knife scraped off the inner bark, which looked like the scrapings from new potatoes. Putting the pulpy stuff in his mouth he chewed it until it formed a mass like oatmeal porridge; then, plastering it around Link's ankle, he used soft willow bark to bind it there. In a couple of hours the pain left him, and by next morning the swelling had disappeared.

It was then that Bill asked us what we had learned about beaver, and when we told him what an awful noise we'd heard, he laughingly remarked:

"Why, that was only the beavers slappin' the water

with their tails when they dived. They did it to give warnin' to their comrades that danger was near. You're great boys, you are. However, when I finish the canoe I'll show you what beavers really do in the way o' work."

Later, when I asked the old hunter if he would make bows and arrows for Link and me, he replied:

"You're right, my son. You should both have 'em. An' you should be able to make 'em yourselves. Not only that, but you must learn what to do if you haven't even a knife. No man is a real woodsman unless he can hunt an' fish an' travel without even a gun, or an ax, or a knife. A real woodsman doesn't need anything from th' outside world. He can live absolutely independent o' civilization. An' I might just as well show you right now how to make a bow an' arrows without th' aid o' even a knife. Then, as soon as you learn to do it for yourselves, I'll make each of you a proper bow, strung with a string o' twisted deer sinews."

After breakfast the old hunter led us down by the shore, where a few days before we had seen part of the skeleton of a wolf that must have been lying there for several years, so hard and white were the weather-bleached bones. Choosing a bone about the thickness and roundness of his little finger and the length of his hand, he then set out in search of some milk-white quartz. I remembered we had seen quartz in a number of places, especially as jagged lining to open pockets in the rocky wall of the cliff. Sure enough, we soon found it there; and with the aid of broken stone, Bill smashed several pieces of the quartz free and carried them away.

"My boys, I'm now goin' to teach you how to make knives, an' spears, an' axes, an' bows an' arrows just as they were made by our ancestors fifty or a hundred thousand years ago. A flinty stone would be better than this quartz, but the quartz is handy an' it'll do. When you've learned how to make flint knives, an' spears, an' arrow-heads without th' aid of any tools, an' when you've learned how to support yourselves independent o' civilization, an' when you've spent the rest o' your lives livin' in the woods learnin' the ways o' beasts an' birds, then you'll be worthy o' bein' called real woodsmen. Then you'll be the real thing—real men o' the livin' forest.

"Now, my lads, with this bone I'll be able to chip quartz or flint an' make it into knives or spears just as our ancestors did in the old stone age. Watch me do it."

Gripped firmly between the fingers and palm of his left hand he held the quartz, and against its blunt edge he steadily pressed the end of the bone with all the force he could command. Suddenly a small piece of quartz flaked off. He kept on thus for about half an hour, chipping off flakes of stone until he had formed the quartz into a sharp-pointed double-edged spear-head, much after the pattern of the ancient flints found on the sites of old Indian burial grounds. As he worked Bill explained:

"This is the way the Indians made their flint arrow- an' spear-heads an' their skinnin' knives. The Walkin' Wonder taught me how to do it when I was a boy. Now, you said you wanted to be great hunters. Try it yourselves. You've got to learn. First you've got to

make your own stone knives. Then you've got to use 'em to make your bows an' arrows. When you've done that, an' when you've killed game with your own home-made huntin' implements, and when you've skinned the game too with your own home-made stone knives, then I'll make for each of you the finest bow an' arrows I can, and I'll teach you how to use 'em as the Indian hunters used to do."

"You're a wise man, Uncle," Lincoln smiled.

"Link, my boy, common sense is so rare that it often creates surprise. An' don't forget, my son, wisdom's always worth more to-day than to-morrow."

That day, while resting Lincoln's ankle, we boys spent most of our time learning how to make stone arrow-heads, and spear-heads, and knives, how to use willow bark, twisted into cord, for our bowstrings, and how to prevent our bowstrings from breaking by placing them in a birchbark tube along with wet moss to keep them moist. Then we practised with the bows and arrows that we had made with our stone knives, and as a reward, that evening the old hunter set about making us the best bows and arrows he could with the aid of his steel knife. But somehow or other we really took more pride in the rough bows and arrows we had made ourselves, though we had to lay them aside when it came to a choice for real hunting.

A few days later I got my turn at being laid up, but it was entirely my own fault. I felt ill so suddenly and so overwhelmingly that I was soon in agony upon the ground. Violent cramps had seized my stomach and I believed I was going to die.

"What you been eatin'?" old Bill frowned.

"Only—a few—berries," I gasped.

"What kind?"

"Oh—blueberries—and a few—claret-colored ones."

"What? Snake berries! Stay with him, Link. I'll be back in a jiffy."

But he first looked around as if he were in search of some particular spot; then hurried away. On his return he carried a bunch of long grass with slender radish-like roots about as thick as lead pencils. Not having a tin dish in which to boil them, as he explained to me, he put some of the roots in his mouth, chewed them up fine, and then took the pulpy, disgusting wad from his mouth and insisted on my eating it at once. When he saw refusal in my frown, he ripped out a queer string of cuss words and added:

"Eat it quick—or you're a goner!"

So I had to gulp down the slimy stuff. It tasted like the quintessence of peppermint and took effect so rapidly that I was soon vomiting. Then I lay still for a while, and old Bill covered my naked stomach with the grass he had gathered and bound it there with willow-bark thongs. He explained it was to keep my stomach warm. I soon fell asleep, and when I awoke some hours later I felt better. But the old woodsman wouldn't let me get up and insisted on my staying in bed for the rest of the day.

Every once in a while during the next few days, when we boys wanted to snatch a little play, we would get out our bows and arrows and resort to target practice. As archers we soon gained considerable skill. At other times we would discard our clothes and race up and down the sandy shore in the warm sunlight. And what

a joy it was to be hustling about as nature intended us to go, without even a thought of clergy or police. Then, too, we always had our morning plunge, and often old Bill made us take another in the evening, as he would never stand for us going to bed dirty.

Thus those glorious, never-to-be-forgotten days hurried by, and thus, too, the canoe neared completion. Though the nights had grown cool, the days were still delightfully mild, for the finest month of all the Northern year had arrived—the middle of August to the middle of September. And thankfully we remembered that there were yet a few days left of that wonderful season. The flies and mosquitoes had already disappeared. But still we had little time left for anything but hard work in preparation for our outward journey.

Late one afternoon, when only the finishing touches remained to be put on our canoe, the old woodsman left off work to examine the fish barrier, and Lincoln reluctantly went to the river to wash his shirt, which old Bill had insisted on his doing. I too stopped work to go in search of spruce gum which the old hunter intended melting—nine parts of gum to one part of grease—in a birchbark dish, to apply to the seams of the canoe to render them watertight. Slinging my quiver over my shoulder I set out alone, because Link still doing his washing could only smile his refusal to come along.

For some time I worked away in the woods back from the shore, when suddenly I noticed out of the corner of my eye, as I stopped to recover a piece of gum that had fallen to the ground, some dark object passing among the trees toward the river. On slowly glancing round I beheld a black bear. Waiting a moment or two, until

the animal had passed behind some trees, I seized my bow and an arrow and began stalking it. I was careful, however, to use the intervening trees and bushes as a screen to prevent the bear seeing me. As the beast was traveling up wind, I approached from behind. Cautiously and silently I followed, stalking it as I imagined a lynx would stalk a rabbit. Before going two hundred yards I saw the animal suddenly sit up and peer beyond the trees on the river bank. Evidently startled, it appeared as if about to run away, yet stared at something beyond the trees. Its strange action was accounted for when on pressing forward I too caught sight of something—it was Lincoln washing his clothes.

Standing ankle deep in the water, he was treading his well-soaked shirt into the dun-colored ocher of the river bottom and washing it Indian fashion, as old Bill Hill had taught us to do, using the dun-colored clay in place of soap. A moment later, however, the bear dropped upon all fours, wheeled half around, and hurried off among the trees. After going a little farther up shore, the animal stopped to feed amid a berry patch. Then, because it was my only chance of success, I made a *détour* to gain the shelter of some trees that stood close to the brute. But my action was seen. Instantly I stood still, just as Bill had told us to. After watching me for a minute or two, the bear resumed its eating. Again I advanced and finally came to within about thirty or forty paces of it. Taking careful aim I let drive an arrow that struck the ground near the beast. Startled, the bear stared at the arrow while I crept still closer, then let fly another one. Again I missed my aim. But this time the bear learned from

whence the arrow came and instantly bolted out of sight among the trees.

Though I was much disappointed, for I had counted on killing the beast single-handed in the hope of impressing old Bill and Lincoln, I persuaded myself that there was now little use in trying to trail the bear and that my time might be better spent in another way. The other way was to help Link gather dry marsh hay with which to stuff his newly washed shirt and prop it up on sticks, like a scarecrow, so that it might dry quickly. That was the way old Bill said the Indians did with their buckskin clothing, and that we might as well learn to dry clothes properly, as we would soon have deerskin smocks and leggings to wash.

That evening, while we were talking about bears, the old woodsman infused some of the Indian tea he had gathered. This he did by heating stones and then placing them in a birchbark dish containing water. After repeating the operation several times, the stones caused the water to boil, then the tea blossoms were thrown into it and allowed to settle. Link and I liked the brew even from the first, especially as it had a slightly minty flavor, and later on, after taking a little every day, grew quite fond of it.

The following morning we were eager to witness the finishing of the canoe by the gumming of its seams. Whittling a handle to one end of a dry pine stick, the old hunter split the other end before placing it in the fire. After a little burning the stick opened like a fork. Taking it in hand, he held it over a seam which had been covered with gum; then, blowing into the crotch of the stick, he re-melted the gum, and spitting on his right

palm, rounded off the gum and smoothed it down. When all the seams had been properly gummed, he placed the canoe right side up upon two logs. After using our birchbark rogans to fill the canoe half full of water, Bill crawled underneath and, lying on his back, marked with charcoal every leakage he could find. In a little while he had made the canoe watertight.

Launching the craft, we got aboard, and not only were we all delighted with it, but old Bill gave Link and me many valuable pointers as to the proper way such a craft should be handled and navigated. I had had a little experience in paddling, but after the old voyageur had instructed me for an hour I had added much to my skill. It was surprising, too, how rapidly Link advanced in the handling of the canoe.

We spent the rest of the day packing up, for now we had everything in readiness to set out upon our canoe voyage. Several hours before sunset our work was completed, and to celebrate the occasion, old Bill peeled a long spiral strip of bark from a birch pole and wound it into the shape of a flageolet. When the rough musical instrument was completed, he delighted us by playing upon it. Lincoln liked its tone so well that nothing would do but he too must play it.

Though we were ready to turn in early, we boys reminded the old hunter of his promise to show us the beaver at work; so after portaging the canoe over to Beaver Creek, he placed it in the pond and silently paddled us up near some mounds that rose above the water. Bill did it by keeping his paddle blade covered all the time and revolving the blade whenever he took a stroke, and yet he was able to paddle nearly as fast

that way as in the ordinary fashion. No wonder we were able to approach while the beavers were at work, for I couldn't detect any sound from either the stroke of the old hunter's blade or the gliding of our canoe.

It was an ideal night for such work, as the moon was shining brightly and merely a whisper of wind was astir, and it too was in our favor.

"Do you see that dome-shaped mound of earth an' barkless sticks showin' above the bushes over there?" and the old hunter pointed. "That's a beaver lodge. Let's get a better look at it. I've often watched them build their lodges," he whispered. "They do most o' the work on moonlight nights, yet I've seen 'em workin' in daylight too. They begin by selectin' a site, which means the right kind o' bottom at the right depth o' water, an' not too far from suitable hardwood trees. They fell trees by standin' on their hind legs, while they gnaw round the trunk about a foot an' a half from the ground, even though the trunk be a foot thick. As you've probably noticed, most shore trees lean toward the water, so when cut by the beavers they fall toward the pond. Then the beavers gnaw off the branches an' after cuttin' 'em into handy lengths, they drag 'em into the water. Seizing 'em in their teeth, they swim home with 'em an' sink 'em in a pile that forms a storehouse o' food they can reach beneath th' ice.

"When they build a house, it's made principally o' barkless sticks an' mud an' sod or anythin' that's near an' can be easily handled. The work keeps on night after night, until at last a dome-shaped mound rises four or five feet above the water. Two tunnels are then

made. Th' outside entrances of these are placed below the frost line, an' the inside ends above th' water line. Sticks an' mud are removed to form an inside room, about two feet high by five or more feet wide. The floor's generally o' two levels, one half about six inches above th' other half, an' on the higher level the beavers sleep.

"In the fall I've often seen beavers carryin' mud to the tops o' their houses an' droppin' it there to thicken an' strengthen the roof when it freezes."

"But, Bill, I once read a book that described the roof of beaver houses as being composed of nothing but sticks," Lincoln remarked.

"I don't doubt it. People forget that local conditions vary so in certain regions that even animals o' the same species have sometimes to live different in one locality from the way the rest of their kind do in other localities. An' in a country over three thousand miles long, that's liable to happen pretty often. Now, my boys, keep your eyes skinned for beaver. They look like giant muskrats except for the tail, which is not round but horizontally flat, very broad, an' covered with scales instead o' hair. Sometimes beavers weigh fifty or sixty pounds. You see the tips o' those dead sticks pokin' out o' the water over there? That's where they stored poplar branches for their last winter's food."

Every now and then we noticed a golden streak upon the water, and as it neared us we could see that a beaver was floating a branch toward its home. It propelled the branch by holding it in its teeth as it swam. Then, on nearing its lodge, the animal would suddenly dive and both beaver and branch would disappear. After



The old hunter told us they were carrying up mud and depositing it there, although from where we watched them we could not have sworn to that, as the light was not bright enough to prove it. After that we drifted down stream, and for some time watched two beaver working at an opening in the dam, while just below three swans were gracefully gliding about in the moonlight.

anchoring the branch among the other sticks it had sunk to form a cache of winter food, it would rise and swim away for another supply.

Silently our canoe glided in its wake, and after many intervals of gliding and pausing we finally stopped with the bow of our canoe among the branches of a large poplar tree that beavers had felled into the water. The tree was in full leaf and a number of beaver were working within its shadows. We could hear them passing in and out of the water, creeping along the swaying branches and cutting off the limbs with their great sharp teeth. Every once in a while a beaver would come into view where the moonlight enabled us to see it plainly, so that on two occasions we actually saw them at work.

Sometimes, when they would pause at their labor, they would raise their heads and glance around, but although there was nothing to obstruct their view, I doubt if they realized what we were, as they would presently continue their work with no sign of concern. After watching them for fully an hour, old Bill whispered to Lincoln, who was in the bow, to make a move. But the instant he did so there was such a deafening noise of violent blows upon the placid water that it sounded as if a lot of horses and cows had leaped into the pond all around us. And the motion of the water actually rocked our canoe.

Moving off, we drifted halfway down the pond, then, gliding beneath an overhanging tree, we lay there in its shadow and waited a half hour or so at least, until we again saw beavers swimming. Then, slowly and silently, we emerged, and drifting down toward the beaver lodges, we saw several of the beavers at work

Occasionally one would swim toward the house with a peeled branch in tow, and, after much tugging, finally would land it upon the dome-like roof. Others would mount the roof of the lodge without conveying up any stick. The old hunter told us they were carrying up mud and depositing it there, although from where we watched them we could not have sworn to that, as the light was not bright enough to prove it. However, next morning, when we happened to pass that way, we saw that fully three quarters of the roof was composed of mud, while only about one fourth of it was covered with sticks.

After that we drifted down stream and for some time watched two beavers working at an opening in the dam, while just below three swans were gracefully gliding about in the moonlight.

Immediately upon returning to camp we went to bed, as we counted on making an early start next day. Dawn found us upon our feet, and after a farewell dip in the river—although it was pretty cold—and a hurried breakfast, we started to portage our outfit over the point and paddle down the lake to where a little stream would carry us out to the great river. It was then that we had a chance to try our new tump-lines of deerskin. They were from twelve to fifteen feet in length, tapering gradually from a broad center piece toward each end. The center piece was made to rest on the top of the carrier's head, while the two ends passed down his back and encircled the lower pack, which was carried hip high, while the other packs were adjusted above it in a leaning position against the packer's back. The advantage of carrying loads in this way is that the arms are

left free, and in case the packer stumbles, his load falls free of him and thus may prevent the accident of a broken arm or leg. On the first part of our journey I carried from twenty to thirty pounds until my neck became used to the work; then I tried forty and even fifty at times—at least old Bill said it weighed that much. But when we boys marvelled at the big loads the old woodsman carried, he replied:

“It’s small compared to what some Indians pack. Every voyageur in the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Fur Brigades carries at least two packs o’ fur in a single load, but more often they carry three. Each pack weighs eighty pounds, so that means a load o’ two hundred an’ forty pounds. Even with such a load they can run at a jog-trot over a portage, perhaps half a mile long, without once haltin’.”

When all our stuff was portaged, we loaded and boarded our canoe, the old hunter taking the stern paddle while Link sat in the middle and I knelt in the bow. Then away we paddled on our long voyage to the outer world.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY OF TRAILERS

ON ENTERING the River of the Strange People we took advantage of its slackest water and paddled close to the southern shore until we landed at the foot of the rapids, from where we portaged our outfit up to Bloody Bay, as old Bill had named it. Then we had the full sweep of the great river before us; and although I did not mention it to the others, I was mighty glad to leave Bloody Bay behind me. After an hour's paddle, we crossed several shallow bays where bushels upon bushels of feathers were lodged among the rushes. There, too, we saw quantities of eggshells lying in depressions along the bank; and the old woodsman explained that such places were breeding grounds for swans, geese, ducks, loons, and waders of many kinds.

"Thousands of water fowl must've been here durin' th' moultin' season, an' it's a wonder we didn't see more on our lake. Land birds moult gradually, but water birds lose most o' their pinion feathers at once. So it often happens that for about a week most water fowl are easily caught, 'cause they can't fly. At that time a man with a paddle can kill a lot o' geese in a few minutes. When approached in such a condition, geese try to reach water, but should they fail, they lie down upon the ground, stretchin' their wings an' necks out

flat in the hope they won't be seen. Should they reach water while danger threatens, they'll dive an' stay under as long as they can, even holdin' on to the underwater weeds to keep themselves down.

"I've found that white geese are the best runners, while wavey, or laughin' geese, Canada geese, an' gray geese come next. It takes a good dog to catch either white or wavey, but a man has little trouble in runnin' down either of th' others. Under such conditions, swans are dangerous for an unarmed man to attack, as they can deliver a powerful blow with their wings. The crane defends himself with his dagger-like bill, while the laughin' goose sometimes lies on his back to defend himself.

"In the northern part o' the Barren Grounds I've seen, durin' molting season, flocks o' geese walkin' over the country in such numbers that they reminded me of a great army on the march. The whole mass was separated into units, and each unit was composed solely of one variety o' geese. But as there were many varieties, they gave th' impression o' divisions clothed in different uniforms. At that time o' the year they always march southward. A great mass o' white geese on the march looks like a great snowfield slowly slidin' 'cross the country. Various divisions were constantly passin' each other while on the march. One division would stop to feed, while another would continue to walk; then that one, too, would stop to eat, while the first'd resume its march. The little lakes'd be covered with 'em, an' thousands o' geese'd every now an' then fly a little way, as if tryin' their new wing feathers. Then, growin' tired, they'd land an' start marchin' again.

“Durin’ the moltin’ season, hunters prefer to eat the wings. But in spring an’ fall, when water fowl are usin’ their wings more than their legs, the hunters consider the legs better eatin’. Because the more a limb’s used, the tougher it becomes. I remember one moonlight night, when I was returnin’ from a hunt with an Indian friend o’ mine, how we came on a great flock o’ Canada geese. They seemed to be asleep, for each stood on a single leg with its head tucked under one of its wings. It was a strange sight. The flock must’ve numbered many thousands, for it seemed to cover densely five or six acres. After watchin’ ’em for a while, we crept forward, but the nearest ones heard us. Withdrawin’ their heads they watched us in the dim moonlight, though in a stupid way, for they did not try to escape or make an outcry when my pardner slashed off the heads o’ several of ’em.”

Soon after resuming work with our paddles we crossed the mouth of an inlet, and here noticing a lot of little gutters along the muddy bottom, I asked Bill what had caused them.

“In winter, muskrats use those passageways to travel beneath the thick ice. If we were to follow one of ’em we’d come to a muskrat lodge.” Pointing with his paddle he added: “You see that little mound o’ dead rushes over there? That’s a muskrat house. If we opened it, we’d find the room inside quite clean. Such a house is built by rakin’ the dead rushes from the river’s muddy bottom an’ pilin’ ’em until they rise above the surface. Tunnelin’ down through the mass until an entrance’s found below water, the rats then pile more reeds an’ mud on their mound; an’ clearin’ out the cen-

ter o' the mass, they form th' inner room with its dry floor well above water. From day to day the roof's strengthened until by fall the house rises 'bout three feet above the river. Other muskrats may build their winter quarters by tunnelin' into the bank o' the river an' diggin' out inner chambers for their livin' quarters."

"Don't stop, tell us more," Lincoln coaxed.

"Bill, how is it I see so little when you see so much?" I asked. "When I came down this river I never saw a tenth of the things you've pointed out."

"It's all in the way you look at things," replied the old hunter. "I try to look at nature as th' Indians do, for they're much more observant than white men. It's the way my Indian mother taught me as a child—to look at everythin' an' tell her what I saw. Then, if I didn't understand, she'd explain it to me."

"But tell us more about muskrats," remarked Lincoln.

"All right, my son. But while I think of it, I want you boys to keep a keen lookout for the sight or sign o' men. We'll run into signs pretty soon, an' I don't want to be caught nappin', because it might mean the death of us. So from now on be mighty leery, an' if you see or hear any signs, let me know at once."

Silence ensued, but after a little while I broke it with:

"Don't forget about muskrats."

"Well, my boys, to begin with," he replied, "their range's very small, they often remain in a single pond all their lives. Others, o' course, may take a trip of a mile or two in the fall in search of a new feedin' ground. If met on their overland journey, they sometimes prove great fighters, as they're the bravest of all animals.

Nothin' daunts 'em, not even bear or wolf or man. The muskrat'll tackle anythin' that'll tackle him; an' if cornered will fight any livin' thing. He's hard to kill, especially with a club, as he often springs on a curve an' therefore is hard to hit when in th' air. Yet he's not aggressive if you'll be gentleman enough to get out of his way. But if you remain in his road, he'll attack you, even though you're mounted on a horse, as he once attacked me.

"Nevertheless, he's not quarrelsome an' makes a pleasant pet, bein' gentle an' graceful in his movements an' cleanly an' industrious in his habits. His worst enemy, o' course, is man. But there're lots of others ever ready to kill him, such as owls, hawks, wolves, foxes, otters, wolverines, bears, ermines, an' minks. The last two will go through the south side of the muskrat's lodge. If the rat's away, they'll wait for him near the mouth of his tunnel, an' if little bubbles rise, they'll know the rat's returnin' an'll grab him by the back of his neck as he rises to the surface."

Lincoln and I had stopped paddling to listen, and presently the old hunter turned the canoe as he said:

"Well, my boys, since you expect me not only to do all the talkin' but all the workin' too, I'll turn in here out o' the current to keep her from driftin'. Now, you lads shove your paddles down into the mud an' hold her if you want to hear any more."

That we did, and then he continued:

"The muskrat's feet make a pretty track; the hind feet, which 're much larger than the forefeet, make a track somewhat resemblin' that of a duck, as if the rat's hind feet were web-toed. Sometimes aroun' noon,



“My boys, from now on I want you to be ever on th’ alert to find any trace o’ trippers havin’ passed up this river; because I expect that at least one party has passed up stream since we were canoe-wrecked.”

“Are you alluding to the Mounted Police?” Lincoln asked.

“No, my boy, I’m alludin’ to the murderers of our canoemen.”

when the sun's shinin', you may spy a dozen or more rats restin' or sunnin' themselves in the water, though you may see nothin' more than a lot o' little sticks protrudin' above the surface, and which a moment later may turn into wigglin' muskrat tails. When alarmed, the muskrat dives, slappin' the water loudly with his tail to warn his brothers. Th' Indians say, if you want to head him off, you must watch the curve of his tail when he disappears in the water so as to tell in which direction he intends to swim beneath the surface. But it's not always a sure sign. His tail is o' great use to him in swimmin', as he uses it much as a boatman uses a stern oar.

"If instantly killed, a muskrat'll sink, but if merely wounded he'll flutter about an' swim round an' round before he goes down. When a dead muskrat sinks an' the hunter wishes to secure it, he'll place his gun at an angle close to the water an' discharge it. Usually that'll cause the body to rise to the surface. Th' Indians often slap the surface o' the water with the flat of a paddle blade to answer the same purpose. An' when a couple o' hunters wish to bring muskrats within easy range o' their bows an' arrows or of their guns, one'll paddle the canoe about the pond while th' other slaps the surface with his paddle to make the rats come out of their houses to see what's goin' on.

"Muskrats usually feed at sunrise an' sunset, an' they eat almost every plant that grows under water; includin' the stalks an' roots o' lilies, flags, bulrushes, an' water onions. But never the water parsnip or carrot. That is considered deadly poison. My father once lost nine head o' cattle that ate it. The muskrat's a clean an'

particular feeder, an' delights in the taste o' salt, so much so that if you put a little salt on his trail, near where he rises from the water, an' set your trap close to it, you'll stand a good chance o' catchin' him. He stores for winter use a certain amount o' food beside his lodge, anchorin' it by placin' one end o' the stalks in the mud to prevent 'em from driftin' away.

"His sight an' hearin' are pretty keen, but his scent's even more so. He has no trouble scentin' the hunter whose tobacco or gun smoke may be lyin' over the water. In huntin' rats, dogs 're of much help, as the dog'll scent out runways, or th' openings of underground tunnels. Muskrats are more often speared by the hunter, though he may kill many with his bow an' arrows. If the muskrat hasn't been clubbed to death, an' if he has been properly skinned an' dressed, he's as nice to eat as a suckin' pig, an' a hang sight cleaner. Accordin' to Indian folklore, the muskrat never forgets an insult or an injury an' always remembers every kindness that's shown him, an' accordin' to actual life he's pretty much of a gentleman. An' as to courage, as I said before, he's the bravest of all North American animals."

After continuing our paddle for an hour or so hunger drove us ashore, and after the meal Lincoln went off among the trees, then came running back to tell us he had seen a wolf. He had gone within thirty or forty paces of the brute before he noticed it, and instead of running away, it stood gazing at him. Finally it turned aside and merely walked off in a most dignified way, as if it had nothing to fear.

"It must've been a mother wolf with her litter o'

puppies hidden somewhere near. Otherwise it'd hardly have acted that way," Bill Hill explained. "No doubt, if you had advanced toward her, she'd have led you off as slowly as she dared in quite th' opposite direction from her den in order to entice you away from her young."

Toward the end of the afternoon the old woodsman espied a good camping place on a high point on the western shore, for here the river curved southward, so we landed. And instead of making a brush wind-break, we carried up the canoe, as we intended sleeping beneath it, for the sky was clouding up as if it might rain. But when our fire began to crackle and our supper to sizzle, a spirit of contentment possessed us and we gave little further heed to the weather.

"My boys, from now on I want you to be ever on the alert to find any trace o' trippers havin' recently passed up this river. Every once in a while we'll land on th' other bank, too, because I expect that at least one party has passed up stream since we were canoe-wrecked."

"Are you alluding to the Mounted Police?" Lincoln asked.

"No, my boy, I'm alludin' to the murderers of our canoemen. An' the sooner we pick up their tracks again and keep careful watch for 'em, the better for us. An' that reminds me, there's another subject, a very important one, in which I should instruct you the first chance I get, as not only our lives, but the lives of others may depend on it. The subject is—the trailin' o' men."

About midnight we were awakened by a thunderstorm that came racing across country and struck us

with such force that its wind rolled our canoe over and over toward the very edge of the rock. Had not the old hunter seized it in time and called us to help hold it, it would have gone over the cliff and been dashed to pieces. Then we struggled back with it, and in the drenching rain we turned it bottom up and tied it to a tree, as well as anchoring it with several logs. Storing our packs beneath it again, we crawled under and tried to sleep in our soaking wet clothes. But when the rain and wind abated, the old woodsman built a fire and in its glow we stripped. Next morning we discovered that the old man had spent a wakeful hour or two in the drying of our clothes. When we thanked him, he said:

"My boys, one way o' bein' happy is to help the helpless."

We spent part of the morning in opening and airing and sunning our packs to dry them thoroughly before we ventured again on our way. While waiting for our things to dry we went off in search of berries. Our canoe and outfit, being protected by a screen of evergreen trees, could not be seen from the river. Though we failed to find any berries, old Bill made a thrilling discovery, and he spent fully half an hour silently examining the scene of it. Meanwhile Lincoln and I did our best to read what had happened, but all we saw was a mattress of brush that looked as if some large creature had lain upon it—maybe a couple of bears or a moose. At last the old hunter straightened up and asked:

"What do you make of it, my boys?"

"Nothing," I replied, and Lincoln answered, "I'll give it up."

"What a pity 'tis you can't see anythin'. My boys,

this is the most interesting story I've read for many a day."

"Really!" Lincoln exclaimed.

"Tell us," I asked.

"Days ago two men slept here," the old hunter exclaimed, "but though they had an ax an' a knife, they ate their food raw, evidently because they dared not cook it lest the smoke of their fire be seen by enemies from whom they were tryin' to escape. But the two men who slept here were not white men. They were Indians."

"But how can you tell all that?" I doubted.

"Sit down, my sons, an' I'll tell you a little about trailin'. In trailin' the first thing to consider is what made the trail, man or beast? If man, was he Indian, white man, or half-breed? If the tracks were made by a white man, the trailin' is simple. The first thing the trailer does is to learn why the man is travelin'. Is he huntin'? Is he prospectin'? Is he fishin'? Is he travelin'? Is he fleein'? Is he lost? Or is he makin' mischief? Those are the first questions an Indian trailer'll try to answer. If the white man was huntin', th' Indians would see signs of it. The white man would be followin' a game trail. Or he would be headin' for a game region. Or he would be settin' traps or snares an' his overnight camps would tell much about his plans. My boys, these men were not here for the purpose o' huntin'.

"If the white man was prospectin', he would be headin' not for game, but for outcroppings o' mineral coloration on rocky faces of hills or mountains, or for gravelly river benches an' bars that'd lend themselves to placer

minin'. Or he would be wanderin' here an' there all over rocky country, breakin' twigs as he went in order not to lose his trail, an' he'd be pullin' aside moss an' leaves an' overturnin' stones with his prospector's pick. My boys, these men were not here for the purpose o' prospectin'.

"Neither were they lost, for they were experienced woodsmen who could not be lost beside a great river. Neither were they fishin', because their food was covered with feathers an' leaves. Neither were they makin' mischief; instead o' that, they were actually fleein' from it and no doubt travelin' as fast as caution would let 'em."

"But, Bill, you said the men who slept here were Indians and yet you've been talking of white men," said Lincoln.

"True, my boy, but be patient an' listen to me an' I'll explain the difference between the way a white man travels an' the way an Indian travels. Then you'll see for yourselves that the men who slept here were Indians.

"If the men who made the tracks were hunters, fishermen, prospectors, travelers, or lost men, then the trailer would trail on sight an' without precaution. As he hurried along, he'd be readin' the signs an' listenin' for gunshots or choppin' or shoutin' or talkin'. But if the men were makin' mischief, or fleein' from justice, then the trailer would use his utmost caution an' advance as if danger were always just a few paces ahead, lest he be trapped by the men he was pursuin'.

"The first thing the trailer would want to know would be how old was the trail. When that was settled,

he'd know better what to expect, an' could be in readiness for it. The next thing the trailer would want to find out would be, for what point were th' outlaws headin'? That settled, he would have won half the battle. But if the trailer found th' outlaws had no definite point in view, he'd then be up against it, as he'd never know what to expect, or when trouble might be brewin'. Thus, everythin' he'd read would regulate the trailer's speed o' travel. For if the trail was fresh, the pursuer'd run the risk o' bein' trapped by th' outlaws circlin' to watch whether their trail was bein' followed.

"If the trail was but a few hours old, the trailer would approach with great caution, an' greater caution still when nearin' th' outlaws. For then the trailer would trail the men just as he'd trail a moose. The trailer would then circle occasionally, especially if th' outlaws were about to camp. He'd do it, too, in the hope o' headin' them off an' takin' them by surprise from the farther side. The trailer would even advance on his hands an' knees to watch, an' retire without th' outlaws knowin' they'd been observed. But even before the trailer would come upon th' outlaws, he'd know how they were armed, whether with firearms or bows an'——."

"But, Bill, how do you know that the men that camped here were not armed with guns?" I interrupted, as I waved a hand toward the brush mattress.

"A little reasonin', my boy, would tell me that, without even such a sign as this," the old hunter replied, as he held up a shaving. "This is willow bark, shaved

from a willow wand, the size used for arrows, an' shaved too with a sharp knife. Besides, reason tells that the party from which these two men escaped would never let them get hold o' firearms. Over there is the very stick which they used to snare the very partridge that wore those feathers you see on the ground before you.

"The reason I said they had an ax an' a knife is because the brush of this bed was cut with an ax, an' the willow shavin's were cut with a knife, as you can plainly see for yourselves. An' the reason I said they were Indians is because they were usin' bows an' arrows as well as a partridge snare. Their bed, as you see, is shorter than white men generally use, because Indians more often curl up when sleepin' than white men do. Also the bed's laid on risin' ground, while most white men lay their beds in hollows, for they so often imagine a hollow is warmest; whereas an Indian when he makes his bed counts on rain fallin' or snow meltin' an' drainin' away from it.

"That reminds me, my boys, that th' Indians o' the Plains often use grass or willows as a favorite mattress, while th' Indians who hunt in the Barren Grounds are such a shiftless crowd that they sleep much as animals do. For when moss is not at hand they'll lie upon rocks or make use o' any old place for a bed. But the Strong Woods Indians are better woodsmen, an' generally use evergreen brush, an' often take care to make themselves comfortable beds. Moreover, they're wise enough not to camp beneath a big dead tree or a large tree with dead branches lest they be crushed durin' a stormy night. However, my sons, I'm makin' a guess that the men who slept here were Indians. So now let's be

movin' along an' then we'll soon learn whether I'm right or wrong."

The day had turned cold. The wind swinging to the north made Bill Hill worry over our delay, and he remarked:

"Winter comes so suddenly in this country that I'm afraid the first snow flurry—an' for that matter the first ice too—isn't far away. It's most important that we should cover every mile we can by paddle before the comin' o' the freeze-up. Because it's much easier to make a big day's travel by canoe than it is on snowshoes. If we only had deerskins we could make a sail. Then when a fair wind offered we could cover more miles in a single day under sail than we could in two days with our paddles. But there's one thing we ought to pray for, an' that is, when th' ice does overtake us that it'll find us in a good huntin' region, as we'll then have to camp for a long time before we can gather all that'll be needed to make our winter clothin' an' our sleds an' snowshoes for winter travel. I hope, too, that we'll fall in with another band o' deer before the snow comes. The great herds o' Barren Ground caribou travel south, seekin' shelter o' the woods at this time o' the year. If we could fall in with such a herd we would find it easy to secure all the skins we need, an' I won't be surprised if we do."

"How large were the biggest herds you've ever seen?" I asked the old hunter.

"Sometimes the herds are so large that the deer are countless. But perhaps you may get some idea of their numbers if I tell you that once I saw the steady passin' of a herd so vast that it took hours to pass us.

They were goin' by in thousands, just like the great herds o' buffalo that used to roam the prairies years ago."

About noon we got under way once more and soon came to water that was so swift that, though we paddled hard, we made little headway. So Bill decided we would go ashore and haul the canoe with our deerskin tracking line. Fastening the line first to the center of a forward thwart, then passing it forward a couple of feet, the old voyageur looped it round the canoe, about three feet from the bow. The line was so adjusted that when it was drawn taut the strain came exactly amid the gunwales. The other end of the line was formed into a loop, and back of it a short branch line was secured, which also ended in a loop.

When all was in readiness, Bill slipped his head and one shoulder through the end loop; likewise I took the second loop, while Link in the canoe used his paddle to keep it offshore. Then we set off at a brisk walk along the river bank. In places the current was so strong that though Link was kneeling in the stern, it required all his strength and skill to keep the canoe from swerving round, while Bill and I, leaning far forward, tugged hard upon the line and made the best of our way along the rugged bank. Sometimes we would be wading waist-deep across an inlet; sometimes climbing high up the bank to clear our line of bushes that grew along the water's edge; sometimes, too, making our way among the branches of a tree that leaned over the swift river. It was exceedingly hard work, requiring much care, otherwise we might at any moment have lost our footing and tumbled into the swirling waters.

All went well for several hours, then just as we were rounding a point about which the water rushed with unusual force, we felt an extra hard tug upon the line, and glancing round saw that Link had lost control of the canoe, as the powerful current had forced the bow out stream. Every second the canoe was swerving farther round. There was nothing to do but release the craft or it would capsize. Instantly casting off our loops we let go the line.

"Let 'er swing round," Bill shouted to Lincoln, as we rushed back along the bank in the hope of rendering aid. The canoe, swinging about, drifted broadside down stream, while Link was backing water to bring it ashore. All was now going well until the unexpected happened. The sinking line allowed one of its loops to catch upon a submerged rock, and thus, when the line ran taut, the canoe was jerked about with such force that Lincoln lost his balance and fell overboard. Instantly the old man's shirt was thrown upon the shore and there was a splash in the river, but the incident happened so near the bank that it wasn't long before the old woodsman had landed both the canoeist and the canoe. It all ended in hearty laughter—especially when the old gentleman insisted on Lincoln wearing his shirt until his own was dry. Luckily the canoe had not shipped any water, so everything was dry except Link and his rescuer.

CHAPTER X

SIGNS OF THE MURDERERS

AFTER paddling for an hour or two, we were warned by floating foam that another cataract was not far away. Later, on landing at a suitable place on the north side of the river, where we could portage our canoe and outfit round the rapids, the old hunter cautioned us to wait while he first inspected the place. The surrounding trees were a perfect glory of autumnal coloring.

“Remember, my boys, we needn’t look for trouble behind us, for I’m sure it’s now travelin’ in front of us. So while paddlin’, I want you to keep a sharp lookout for signs of a canoe, or of a camp, or of men walkin’ along the bank. The first men we’re likely to encounter—if they’re still alive—are the two Indians whose camp we discovered this mornin’.” Then he changed his mind, saying, “Come, boys, help me examine this place for signs of man. But if you find any tracks, don’t step on ’em. It’s a likely place for a canoe to land to make the portage. The bank’s not so steep nor the trees so dense as on the southern shore. An’ the two Indians would, of course, pass here unless they had previously rafted themselves across the river.”

So we set to work at once, and a few minutes later the old woodsman made his first discovery.

“What do you make o’ that mark there?” he asked.

We studied it for a while and, though rain had softened its edges, it looked to me as if it had been made by the turning over of a very big canoe. Apparently the end of the overturned gunwales, at the bow or stern, had dug deep in the soil. That is what I told him.

“Good! You’re right. They lifted the canoe out of the water bottom-side down, then carried it here an’ turned it over, bottom side up. Then they lifted it high an’ rested its gunwales on the shoulders o’ four men, who then carried it over the portage. Now both of you try an’ find a mark made by th’ other end of the canoe. But first reason the thing out. Consider the way they landed. The way they carried up the canoe. The way they turned it over. An’ the way they’d carry it off. Also examine more carefully that mark in the earth. Then decide the direction in which you should search.”

We did so, and soon found in the grass farther up the bank that another square hole had been made in the ground.

“Now pace the distance between the two holes, an’ you’ll learn the size of the canoe. If it’s about thirty-two feet, it’ll mean a thirty-six-foot canoe.”

Old Bill was right.

“Now, my boys, we’ve settled that those marks were made by a six-fathom canoe, probably belonging to the Hudson’s Bay Company. The next thing to learn is what kind o’ men composed the crew; and why they were travelin’ along this river. Let us now walk slowly over the portage in the hope o’ findin’ further signs of ’em. Separate a little, one on either side o’ me, so we’ll

cover more ground. You follow a little behind me, as I'll understand better the way they would likely travel."

Though it was easy to follow the trail, for it appeared as if many trips had been made in portaging a heavy cargo around the rapids, the grass and bushes being much trodden down, we saw no definite signs until we neared the other end of the portage and began to descend the slope toward the upper river near the head of the rapids.

"A tree cut here!" exclaimed Lincoln.

"Yes, a dead one, cut for firewood," the old man replied; "an' judgin' from the marks, it was done with a three-an'-a-half pound 'choppin' ax'—the kind a hunter wouldn't carry."

"There's another stump," I pointed.

"Yes, to supply brush for their beds," Bill explained.

Then we came upon the ashes and burnt logs of a former campfire, and two mattresses of brush, around which remained a few sticks that had served as tent pegs. A little to one side we noticed another fireplace but a much smaller one, as well as a third mattress of brush. After the old hunter made a careful inspection of the larger fireplace, he remarked:

"Six white men camped here in rainy weather several weeks ago, but I can't decide within a week or so of the date. At the smaller fireplace two Indians spent a night some time after the white men had passed up the river."

"Bill, how on earth do you know all that?" I asked.

"My boy, let's start our fire, then we can discuss the subject while we're cookin' supper."

And as the work progressed, the woodsman continued:

"Consider, for instance, the larger fireplace. From the charred logs that remain you can see that the fire was built with the sticks lyin' parallel. The forest Indian usually builds his fires tepee fashion. So the big fireplace bespeaks white men. The tent pegs, too, tell o' white men. Th' Indian wouldn't be bothered with 'em. He'd merely cut a couple o' poles an' lay 'em inside the tent along the sod-cloth. The use o' tents suggests wet weather. The white men were probably usin' fryin' pans to do their cookin', while th' Indians were either cookin' their food on the coals or on sticks, as you can plainly see by that burnt stick over there. An' there, too, is the very hole in the ground into which the thin end was thrust to slant it over the fire.

"By the way, my sons, when an Indian's trailin' a man, he takes care to sleep in unlikely places, such as a depression in the middle of an open space, so as to run less risk o' being seen, as his enemy'd naturally be suspicious of the more secluded an' likely places. Then, too, the trailer'd not make a fire even in winter time, as the choppin' o' wood or the risin' o' smoke might attract attention. But if the trailer was trailin' animals, he'd halt in a thicket to hide his camp. The fact that two Indians dared to light a fire here suggests that they knew their enemies had advanced far out o' sight of 'em."

"But, Bill, I don't understand how the grass could be so trodden down if only the crew of one canoe had recently passed this way?" I inquired.

"My boy, you must remember that there must've been six men in that crew, an' they were portagin' a very heavy cargo. An' I won't be surprised if we later on learn that it was composed o' sacks of gold."

"Then you think the miners have already passed this way?" Lincoln exclaimed with sudden delight.

"No, my son. I believe that the white men who portaged over this trail were nothin' but a gang o' thieves. How many there were I don't yet know, but probably six. I do know that they're a slovenly crowd an' mighty poor woodsmen, judgin' from their ax work an' what's left of their camp."

After supper, while I was grinding down my fingernails with a bit of sandstone, Lincoln went to gather dry grass with which to stuff his shirt to help dry it. Then old Bill and I set out to collect firewood and on our return we found Link all excitement. He declared he had heard someone shouting to attract his attention. Greatly surprised, we listened for perhaps five minutes, and hearing nothing unusual, we began to think Lincoln had been mistaken, when suddenly over the water came the distant cry of:

"Hoyie! . . . hoyie! . . . hoyie!"

"My boy, that's not a man," smiled the old hunter, "it's a loon. An' if we went down to the bank I'm sure we'd see the loon that's makin' the noise. But, Link, you're actin' as if you're afraid o' somethin'. A great man never lacks grit. Besides, why fear anythin'? Even death can only overtake us once; an' it's goin' to overtake us anyway; so even then there's no use kickin' up a fuss about it."

The following morning, after giving our canoe its daily regumming, we resumed paddling and made good progress. About noon Bill noticed something swimming ahead. At first he could not make it out, but on drawing nearer we saw that it was a Canada lynx swimming



Driving the canoe alongside, Bill was cautiously examining the lynx when suddenly it came to life, reached up, and catching its claws upon the gunwale, leaped aboard between the old woodsman and Lincoln. Drawing his knife, Bill lunged at the snarling beast; but the animal was so full of fight that it dodged the knife, and struck at the hunter. Again lunging at the brute, Bill not only knocked it down, but mortally wounded it.

from an island to the shore. As the hunter drew his bow, Link begged for a shot, so while we headed and steadied the canoe, he tried his skill. Twice he missed, the arrows skipping and skimming far over the water.

"Take a steadier aim, my boy," Bill cautioned.

The next arrow struck the lynx in the neck. As we drew closer to the brute, Link sent another arrow into its body. After a momentary struggle the beast turned over and floated motionlessly. Driving the canoe alongside, Bill was cautiously examining it when suddenly it came to life, reached up, and catching its claws upon the gunwale, leaped aboard between the old woodsman and Lincoln. Drawing his knife, Bill lunged at the snarling beast; but the animal was so full of fight that it dodged the knife and struck at the hunter. Again lunging at the brute, Bill not only knocked it down, but mortally wounded the beast, and it soon expired.

While we boys were helping the old woodsman cook lunch, I commented on the lynx's ability as a swimmer, and Bill replied:

"Yes, my boy, the lynx is a fine swimmer, an' notwithstanding that it's a land animal, I'll back it against th' otter or the beaver for speed in surface swimmin'. But, of course, it couldn't compete with them in underwater work. As you see, it has big feet, an' when chased it seems to leap through the water at great speed. But I've never known it to take to divin'. It seems to hate to get its head wet. Therefore, when it leaps into water it makes a great splash as it strikes on its belly, an' though it has but a stub of a tail, it can turn like a flash in water. Its little tail, as you may've noticed, is usually cocked. But if wounded, down it goes

like the tail of a wounded deer. The lynx has an almost noiseless tread, bein' as careful a walker as a cat, an' when branches brush against its fur, the hunter can detect no sound. When pursued on land it travels fairly fast, not by ordinary runnin', but by leapin', an' it finds no trouble in goin' over fallen timber at a single bound. In the woods a wolf or a dog rarely ever catches a lynx, because it'll take to a tree. But in th' open, where a dog or a wolf has a chance to wind the lynx before it gains refuge, its chances of escape are greatly lessened.

"When it tries for a tree, it'll go up eight or ten feet in a single bound, then take to a branch where it'll lie down an' try to frighten its enemy away by endless hissin'. The lynx has wonderful eyes that are very expressive o' fear an' anger, as you no doubt noticed a little while ago. When roused, its eyes contain an intensely vicious gleam, an' it seems to be tryin' to hypnotize its enemy with its steady, blinkless stare. The lynx'll spring quite a long distance from one tree to another, that is, from an upper branch to a lower one. Or it'll leap down fifteen or twenty feet from a branch to the ground an' always land on its feet.

"Its food is principally rabbits an' birds, an' though it'll never, unprovoked, attack man, it'll sometimes attack deer or young caribou. It's a great rover an' will migrate in summer or winter if food runs short. One rarely ever sees a lynx drinkin'; in that way it's different from the fox, but when a lynx does drink, it laps the water like a cat.

"Durin' the matin' season, in March, the lynx'll choose a spot where it'll come, time an' time again, to

caterwaul by the hour, especially if the moon's shinin'. The young, from one to five, are born in June, an' if taken in hand when a few weeks old, make most interestin' pets. The lynx isn't as frightened o' human bein's as most other wild animals are. Yet it never attacks man unless cornered or trapped; nevertheless, it's a good fighter. It attacks by strikin' an' scratchin', an' when it seizes hold of its prey, it'll bite viciously, suckin' blood as it chews away. Though its sense o' smell's not as keen as that of some other animals, it's very fond o' certain scents, such as bergamot, oil of aniseed, eau de Cologne, an' castoreum; the latter is especially attractive to the lynx. Yet it hunts mostly by sight an' does most of its huntin' by night.

"The coat of the lynx forms a valuable fur, but in spring, when the snow is thawin', its value is greatly lessened. At that time, too, the lynx seems to make a great fuss over gettin' its feet wet and is given to moanin' an' cryin' like a child. In soft snow the prints of its hind feet are long an' large, somewhat suggestin' those of a bear, while the prints of its fore feet are quite round."

That afternoon we saw a number of caribou swimming across the river, but they were too far off for us to overtake them, and upon reaching the shore they soon vanished among the trees. Toward evening we passed a marshy inlet on the north shore where in the distance we saw a number of beaver lodges; and later we entered an island-dotted lake and camped upon its southern shore.

The following day was uneventful, but the day after we were favored with a stern wind and the weather

being mild and sunless, we all took off our shirts and, rigging them between sticks, hoisted them to answer as sails. All day long we scurried away to the tune of gurgling waters and lapping waves. Even until midnight the wind drove us along, but at last we again came to white waters and camped on the north shore.

In the morning, while I was gathering wood for our breakfast fire, I discovered an old camping site, and decided to do a little investigating before I called the others. The ashes and charred stick ends suggested that the fire had been laid like the one Bill claimed was made by Indians. The brush mattress was much like the one they had made, and two slender, fire-scorched sticks suggested they had been used for broiling meat and made me believe the spot had been occupied by the same two men who the old hunter claimed were two Indians trying to avoid the other party of the big canoe. And when Bill examined the spot, he thought so, too, but found something I had overlooked, and that was a little piece of leather. While eating our breakfast he remarked about the leather:

“My boys, this bit o’ skin is from the rawhide of a beaver, an’ from the way it has been cut, it seems to me someone’s been cuttin’ a string for a bow. Beaver skin makes a good bowstring because moisture doesn’t affect it the same as it does the skin or sinew o’ most other animals. Th’ Eskimos an’ th’ Indians of the Mackenzie River an’ Great Slave Lake prefer to use sinew for their bowstrings, though the Beaver Indians of the Liard River use beaver skin. But I don’t think th’ Indians that cut this skin were Beaver Indians. I believe they were Indians from the south o’ here who

were merely makin' use o' the best material they could find for their bowstrings. This bit of leather makes me all the more sure that the men were Indians."

While portaging our stuff, Bill found several pieces of stone which proved to be hornblende, a mineral which is used by the Hudson's Bay Company at many of their posts for the purpose of sharpening knives and other instruments requiring an extra keen edge; and the old hunter assured us it was about equal to the imported Turkey oilstone. The discovery elated him, for he knew that by using fish oil as a lubricant he could grind a very sharp edge on his knife, and it certainly needed it, as he had had nothing but sandstone for that purpose.

All day the east wind continued to blow, and we made such headway that we reached Caribou Lake that afternoon. Before it began to rain we were encamped upon the southern shore. During the night, however, the wind changed, and when sleep left me for a little while, I looked up to find the heavens were ablaze with a beautiful display of Northern Lights. It must have lasted many hours, for off and on I fell asleep; then I would wake again, and every time I looked up it was still aflare.

At dawn we found that a beautiful transformation had taken place. The whole landscape was bathed in a mysterious haze that softened every outline, and instead of the usual somber masses of evergreens, the trees were enrobed in lustrous shades of pearly gray. When the sun appeared, its warm light sparkled upon the tips of the tallest trees, then rising higher, its long slanting rays touched the heavily coated hoar frost upon drooping

twigs and bending blades until the whole valley was a glistening mass of dazzling splendor. It was an enchanting scene and we were loath to turn aside to resume our way. During the morning Bill pointed out one of Mr. Perkins's old camping grounds, but we did not halt there. That afternoon snow flurries came and went, some even clouding our view of the river; later a violent wind overtook us, and we went ashore to make our evening camp.

What with days of heavy paddling, poling, and tracking against head winds and swift currents, our progress was slow; yet other days of slack waters and favorable winds saw us making good speed. But we did not discover any more signs of either the two Indians or the white men of the big canoe. While some days were uneventful, others contained incidents of intense interest. Such was the evening of the day we camped high above the water in a sheltered spot where plenty of fuel was at hand, on the north side of the river. At sunset, while gathering wood, the old hunter climbed a little hill to get a better view of the surrounding country, and no sooner had he gained the top than he excitedly beckoned to us, as he shouted:

"La foule ! . . . La foule ! Oh, boys! . . . here they come!"

Without waiting for an explanation, we ran breathlessly up to the summit and there we beheld a sight I will never forget. Far away at the foot of distant rolling hills along the northern horizon there was a "barrens" fully two miles wide, and across that treeless tract a great living, moving mass was slowly making its way southward. Never had I dreamed of seeing such an

endless mass of living creatures. I was too thrilled to speak, but Lincoln breathlessly exclaimed:

"What on earth are they?"

"They're caribou—Barren Ground caribou," smiled the old woodsman. "A sight worth seein'—isn't it?—an' perhaps you'll never see it again!"

Truly it was an amazing sight. The valley through which the great herd was passing led straight toward us, and Bill assured us the deer would pass between our hill and the hill to the westward. He also explained that from the lay of the land and the narrowness of the neighboring part of the river it must be a regular crossing place for those particular deer on their spring and fall migrations from south to north and north to south again. Though we stood watching them, the deer were still a long way off.

"We'd better move our camp up here, out of the way o' the deer; but we'll have to bank our fire an' stow our canoe under that ledge o' rock. Otherwise it might be smashed by th' overrunnin' mass o' caribou."

After supper we rigged up a strong high stage upon which to store our packs and placed our canoe in safety beneath overhanging rock. We remained awake several hours in expectation of the arrival of *la foule*—the Throng—as the great bands of Barren Ground caribou are called in the Northland. Though we had covered our fire, the darkness of the night had long since blotted out all sight of the deer; yet we waited anxiously for their coming, and meanwhile persuaded the old hunter to tell us more about the ways of caribou.

"My boys, there're three kinds o' caribou in Canada. The largest are the mountain caribou livin' in the

Rockies west o' the Mackenzie River. They've the finest horns an' the darkest coats—in fact, they're often called black caribou. The woodland caribou, though they're next in size, have the smallest horns, an' they live in the Strong Woods Country. The smallest in size are that Barren Ground caribou that inhabit the great prairie country between Hudson Bay an' the Mackenzie River, from th' Arctic Coast on the north to th' edge o' the Great Northern Forest on the south."

"Then has this herd nearly reached its southern limit?" I asked.

"Yes, an' it's a very unusual thing that they come so far south before turnin' east or west to spend the winter. But as I was sayin', though the Barren Ground caribou are the smallest caribou, their horns, though slender, are very large. Every spring, that is, when the snow starts to thaw an' th' ice is still hard enough to bear them, the Barren Ground caribou leave the woods an' head north for the Barren Grounds. The first part o' their trip is through the Border Lands where the big trees end, an' the next part is through the Land o' Little Sticks where the trees have dwindled in size to the height of a man. The herds, so far, are composed o' both male an' female deer; but when nearin' th' edge o' the Barren Grounds, the next stage of their northern journey, the females separate from the males an' continue across the Barren Grounds to spend the summer with their newly born calves, as far north as th' Arctic coast. Meanwhile, most o' the males spend the summer in the Land o' Little Sticks.

"Think how remarkable it is the way nature provides for the protection of the young. About the time the

males an' females separate the cows lose their scent. That is, they leave no scent on their trail. Yet all the while the males continue to shed their scent from a gland between the toes of the hind feet. Thus nearly all the wolves and wolverines that've been followin' the great trail are now diverted from the tracks of the females to those of the males. So in that way every year thousands upon thousands of calves are saved from slaughter. While the Barren Grounds may average about five hundred miles from south to north, the Land o' Little Sticks averages about fifty miles from south to north, an' say a thousand miles from east to west.

"It's while enjoyin' their spring feedin' that their new horns appear and their old coats are shed an' their new horns an' new coats begin to grow. The bulls remain in the Land o' Little Sticks until nearly autumn, or when the berries ripen; then they travel a number o' miles into the Barren Grounds to meet the returnin' cows, with their calves. Then the bulls, turnin' about, accompany the cows across the Land o' Little Sticks, an' across the Border Lands on into the edge of the Strong Woods Country, where they all once more spend the winter. Remember, boys, I'm only speakin' in a general way o' some of the great herds; as there are many bulls an' cows scattered all over the Barren Grounds at all times o' the year, even as far north as the Arctic coast.

"Not bein' familiar with this section of the Strong Woods Country, I can't say as to their habits here. But to the westward the caribou generally reach the Big Lakes Country—Great Bear Lake, Great Slave Lake, an' Athabasca Lake—about the middle of Octo-

ber. That's their matin' season an' it lasts about a month.

"About the first o' November, almost as regular as though they carried a calendar, the herds are tryin' to cross the smaller lakes, which, however, are not yet properly frozen. So for about ten days or two weeks they may be held up. After which, the Fort Rae deer—I'm still speakin' of the western herds—the Fort Rae deer head for the Horn Mountains, which are really nothin' but high tablelands. Meanwhile the Great Bear Lake deer have been headin' for the highlands on the east side of the Mackenzie River. An' th' Athabasca an' Fond du Lac deer have been headin' for the highlands on th' east side of those lakes. In severe weather they may travel fifty to a hundred miles without stoppin'. In December an' January th' old bulls drop their horns. The young bulls drop theirs a little later. The females don't drop their horns until spring, or until they separate from the bulls. The horns of the bulls are usually dropped when the bulls are playin' together, sparrin' one another, or when they're rubbin' them against trees, bushes, or rocks. The reason Horn Mountains were given that name was that they used to be simply littered with caribou horns.

"The spread o' the caribou's feet is so large for the size of its body that it can cross ice that's too thin to support the weight o' a man. An' the same thing applies to crusted snow an' swampy ground. Naturally, such a spread o' foot's a great help in swimmin', an' in water the caribou's a swift traveler. The male footprint's more pointed than the female. They walk, trot, an' gallop, but only when frightened do they gallop.

An' then, more often, only for a short distance, before settlin' down into a steady, straightaway trot an' walk, trot an' walk, that may cover fifty miles before they stop. In the matin' season they're constantly callin': *O-oo, o-oo, o-oo*, an' then every now an' again givin' a long-drawn-out call like the noise caused by workin' the handle of a wooden pump when it's in need o' primin'. Neither call is a bellow, for both sound more like noises made by pigs.

"The great migration of the Barren Ground caribou is divided into many big herds an' a lot o' smaller bands. Each band or herd has its favorite crossin' place at the various lakes an' rivers that cross its trail. Caribou have remarkably keen sense o' scent; their sight is excellent, an' their hearin' good. Usually when they scent man they leap into the air, wheel round, and are off at a gallop, which they maintain for a short distance; then, settlin' down to a steady trot, they cover five or six miles before they halt. But the distance they cover is largely affected by the strength o' the scent they've discovered. When migratin' they eat, then travel, then eat an' travel again, passin' an' repassin' one another the whole time. But when not migratin' they usually feed at night, an' for two or three hours; then they lie down; again they eat for two or three hours, an' then lie down once more. In the daytime they'll find some open or sunny spot to air themselves an' play an' gambol about; an' they take much delight, too, in playfully hornin' one another.

"When a great herd's travellin', as you'll soon learn, they can be heard a long distance. For what with their gruntin' an' strikin' o' horns against horns, as well as

the clickin' o' their hoofs—which sounds much as if they were comin' loose—a great band o' caribou makes a considerable racket. When big herds are travelin' through the hills, as you'll soon see, the main band prefers to follow the lower valley, while the smaller bands'll pass along the hills on either side or even go up on top as if they wanted to get a better view. Now, my boys, I think I've told you a good deal more than you'll remember about caribou; but I hope you'll try an' observe somethin' I've overlooked when you see the great herd in the mornin'."

Although we listened for a while after Bill had stopped talking, we discovered no sign of deer. Weary from a hard day's work, we presently lay down and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT CARIBOU THRONG

LA FOULE! *La foule!*" shouted the old hunter to awaken us. The sky was again ablaze with the Northern Lights. The surrounding country was as clearly visible as though a full moon were shining. Yet the moon was only in its first quarter and had long since gone to bed. As we stepped to the brow of the hill a wonderful scene lay before us. Down the treeless valley came marching the vast army of deer. So innumerable was the great herd that no sign of its farther end could be seen; yet already the advance guard was passing through the defile at the foot of our hill. Soon they would be passing in even greater multitude. They must have numbered thousands upon thousands of deer.

While marching down the valley the deer were packed so closely together that they were constantly rubbing sides and striking horns, and the pressure of the multitude behind drove those in front in a steady, endless procession that pressed through the defile, and that, too, at a jog-trot. Like a great stream they poured down to the river, entered the water and swam across without an instant's pause. As the outer edges of the herd passed among the scattered trees bordering the valley, the horns of the deer struck upon the branches and made a noise not unlike that of cracked bells being

struck with wooden sticks; and now from the river came endless grunting, as though the stream were filled with swine, and up from the rocky places along the shore rose continuously the sound of clattering hoofs. Another sound we heard when we drew nearer the deer was that strange clicking noise caused by the muscular action of the hoofs in walking, a sound peculiar to caribou.

"Wonderful! . . . just like a dream!" excitedly exclaimed Lincoln.

"Yes . . . a dream come true!" I thrilled.

"We'll have lots o' skins now for our winter clothin'," smiled old Bill. "But before we get to work I must make a ten-foot spear."

Already daylight had arrived, so down the other side of the hill we went in search of a suitable dry spruce, and when found, the old hunter lost no time in removing its bark, whittling it into shape and cutting a groove in the butt, into which the knife handle was to be bound with a thong.

"Now, boys, for a little breakfast, then for the canoe, an' then for the river," Bill said, "because once we start to kill there'll be a heap to do before we stop work again."

"But won't our fire's smoke frighten the deer?" I asked.

"Not now, old man, it'd take a heap more'n that to stampede such a herd. Why, I've walked right slap through the center of a band, an' all they did was to part in front o' me an' close in again behind me. An' all the time I was passin' through the herd the deer were within ten or twenty paces of me."

"Is this the largest herd you've ever seen?" I asked.

"No, my son. Once when I was travellin' through the Barren Grounds, week after week I was passin' great herds, an' for twenty-eight days o' steady paddlin' I was never out o' sight o' caribou. In those days there must've been millions of 'em."

By the time breakfast was over dawn had passed up the river valley and the sun had appeared in an enchanting cloud of mist that was rising off the river. As we descended the hill armed with our bows, arrows, and spears, the whole valley seemed alive with marching deer. Launching our canoe the old woodsman knelt in the bow, Link in the middle, and I in the stern. Paddling toward the mass of swimming deer, their ranks opened; then as we entered the gap they closed in behind us and thus we were completely surrounded. But the caribou paid no more attention to us than had they been domestic cattle. I could see that Link was fairly trembling with excitement, and I knew I was too. Bill now laid his spear beside him in readiness for attack, and turning his head, said to us:

"All right now . . . straight ahead. An' every time I point my paddle or spear at a certain deer, don't wait for me to speak, but paddle hard for that particular deer. An' when I stop paddlin' to pick up my spear, you boys keep on drivin' the canoe ahead so that I can do the spearin'."

Excitedly we boys braced ourselves, gripped our paddles anew, and were ready for violent action. Then Bill pointed with his paddle and instantly we three plunged our paddles into the stream, working with all our might. The canoe rushed right in among the swim-

ming caribou. Seizing his spear the old hunter began thrusting one-handed jabs in such a dexterous way that with every stroke he drove his keen-edged blade deep into the small of a deer's back. As each animal was struck, it suddenly jumped forward, making a strange blowing sound; then, without further struggle, turned upon its side and floated down stream.

I had hoped to try my hand at spearing, but in a few minutes old Bill had secured more than enough for our needs. He had killed twenty-one. Turning about, we faced the swimming herd, which, giving way for us, allowed us to pass through to the open river. Then, paddling hither and thither, we made haste to gather together the floating carcasses and tow them ashore.

"How buoyant they are," I remarked.

"Yes, my boy, that's because o' th' air in the hair that I told you about. Once when I was spearin' deer with some o' my Indian friends they tied together the carcasses, put some brush on top to keep their moccasins dry, an' gettin' aboard, they used the dead mass as a raft on which they poled themselves up stream to camp."

On gaining the shore we three turned in with a will to skin and dress our harvest, Bill, of course, undertaking the hardest and most skillful part of the work with his steel knife, while Link and I pottered around with our bone blades, doing the best we could to help remove the skins. True, it was a messy job, and many a time Link, straightening up, turned his head away and with a frown and uplifted nose would outstretch his greasy, bloody fingers, as though he did not want any one to come in contact with them. It made Bill laugh.

And to own the truth, I was all bent on spearing deer until I saw the old hunter kill so many of those beautiful, gentle creatures. It was then my heart sank within me, especially when the deer would sigh in that heartrending way when the knife plunged into them. Bill said the Indians called that sigh, "The passing of the spirit." It seemed like murder to me.

But the dressing of those deer was not only a messy task, it was a big one too; yet we made good progress. Link and I would sometimes take hold of a skin and pull hard, while old Bill would slash away; and when night came we were so tired that the good old hunter treated us to a nice soft, new brush bed. And from our camp-fire on the hill we watched the last of the great herd pass through the valley. I will remember it as long as I live. It was then, too, that we discovered a number of wolves following in the wake of the caribou, evidently for the purpose of pulling down stragglers.

The next few days were spent in stretching some of the skins and scraping the mack and hair from them. When we were ready to travel again, we had such a load of skins that we had to make a little raft to carry them, which we towed behind the canoe.

Soon after embarking that morning the old hunter noticed a burnt spot on the north shore and headed the canoe toward it to investigate. When we landed we were astonished at what we saw. It proved to be a camping place with several brush mattresses lying near ashes and charred wood, and the burnt ground suggested that, while the campers were asleep, a northwest wind had blown sparks away from the beds, but toward the water, where they had set fire to dry moss and burnt

to cinders a six-fathom birchbark canoe. When Bill searched the spot he not only showed us bits of charred gunwales and thwarts, but also a small part of the birchbark stern from below the waterline, where it had become water-logged and thus survived the fire.

On further examination he also found that a number of large, dry trees had been felled, as though for the purpose of building a raft, and there were marks and chips and timber ends upon the river bank that told where the building of the raft had taken place. Besides, he found a few empty tin cans formerly containing food—luxuries from the city that no woodsman would portage for his own use.

“It’s evident, my boys, that whoever these white men were, they had a heavy load to transport; otherwise they wouldn’t have given themselves the trouble o’ trackin’ such a ponderous raft all the rest o’ the way up this river. The loss o’ their canoe means that instead o’ takin’ days, their trip’ll now take weeks, unless they cache their cargo in order to travel light. An’ now I won’t be a bit surprised if we overtake ’em before they strike the railroad, even though they have a few weeks’ start of us.”

Sometimes we made slow headway on account of towing our little raft against head winds that occasionally drove us ashore and altogether delayed us several days. One day, however, as good fortune would have it, a fair wind favored us, and during that afternoon we entered Wolverine Lake. Turning southward, we followed the eastern shore until it was time to camp. After that we spent two days paddling along the eastern shore; then, as a large island stood in the direction our

old voyageur wanted to go, he headed for it. On reaching it we landed and selected a camping place on the southern side. It was on top of a steep rise of ground from which a good view could be had of a number of other islands.

After supper the moon came up over the hills and mist rose over the lake; and it was with contentment we sat upon our bed beside our fire and chatted happily of many things. We could hear the gentle lapping of the water along the sandy beach, and feel an occasional breath of wind from the southeast. Suddenly out of the stillness of the night we heard a strange, harsh sound something between the bark of a large dog and the short, regular croaking of a giant bullfrog. It came from a point along the shore a little west of us but on our side of the island. Again it sounded:

"Oo-ah, Oo-ah, Oo-ah."

"What's that?" Link whispered.

"It's a bull moose callin' a cow," the old hunter answered, "an' maybe we can bring it this way."

Hurriedly seizing a piece of birchbark, he twisted it into the form of a megaphone about eighteen inches long, and tied it with a thong. Standing in the shadow of the bushes on the brow of the little cliff, he drew a long breath, placed the birchbark horn to his lips and uttered a most unearthly noise that made gooseflesh run up and down my back. The sound he made was in imitation of the rising and falling inflection of the long-drawn bellow that a cow moose makes during the mating season. Then we listened for an answer and soon we heard the short, guttural grunt of the bull's reply:

"Oo-ah, Oo-ah."

Every little while we heard it again and soon learned from the sound that the bull was steadily advancing toward us. I was thrilled and could see Link was, too; both of us were all eagerness to catch sight of the big brute.

After an interval of several minutes, old Bill again imitated the call of a cow, and before he had lowered his horn, we heard a great splashing of water along the northern shore but several hundred yards east of us. Immediately afterward, from the same direction, we heard the loud grunting of another bull. Instantly the bull on our southern shore replied louder than before, and a few moments later he could be heard trotting along the southern beach toward us. Presently we saw a startling, massive form in the shape of a gray silhouette that steadily grew larger and darker as it came through the mist. It grew into a dark, brownish gray, swept along the shore, and stopping suddenly in front of us, began slashing furiously a clump of bushes with its great horns. The hoarse challenge of the second bull, on the northern side of the point, rang out again and was answered defiantly by the southern bull before us. Then we could hear the northern bull break into a trot as it followed the beach round the end of the point.

A few moments later we saw them lunge at each other and heard the clashing of their immense, palmated horns, as the big brutes came together like enormous battering rams. The fight had begun. Spellbound, we crouched, staring at the battle. Separating, the bulls drew back, stood apart a moment, then suddenly

plunged forward, smashing together in head-on collision that made the air ring with the clanging of their horns. On becoming interlocked, each bull strove with straining, swollen neck to force the other down upon his knees.

Soon realizing the uselessness of spending strength that way—for they seemed evenly matched—the northern bull suddenly freed his horns, drew back a little, and while watching his chance for a sudden lunge, stood—not pawing the ground as would a bull of domestic breed—but with his hind feet firmly planted apart; then jumped the forepart of his body rapidly up and down, and with stiffened forelegs drove his hoofs hard upon the ground. That performance took place to the accompaniment of a series of snorts and guttural bellows. Suddenly it ceased. In a couple of leaps the great animal charged forward. With bristling neck and lowered head he hurled his full weight of more than a thousand pounds against his antagonist, who received the impact as best he could with outspread legs and swollen, stiffened neck.

With all their might and main the two strove again to force each other down. Again they failed. Suddenly unlocking horns, each tried to lunge at the other's unprotected side and deliver a fatal thrust. Both expressed their rage by loud and continuous snorting, grunting, and bellowing. Again and again they charged, but after battling for what seemed more than a quarter of an hour, neither had gained a decisive advantage. The southern bull, however, showed signs of weakening—he was the bull that bellowed loudest.

The northern bull, evidently the stronger, finding the

other off guard for a moment, lurched forward and not only knocked the southern bull down, but leaped into the air to strike his enemy a smashing blow with his stiffened forelegs. The wounded moose, however, still rolling from the force of his fall, rolled completely over, and suddenly staggering to his feet, plunged into the lake and disappeared in the mist.

The victor, making no effort to follow, drew himself together, uttered a nasal, grunting sound that echoed far over the water, strode with slow and stately movements down along the beach, and was soon lost in the vapory veil.

After discussing the battle, the old hunter said:

“My boys, when travelin’ overland we’ll pass through good moose country, an’ it’s important you should know how to hunt ’em in case I’m not with you. For unless you know their habits, there’ll be mighty little chance of your killin’ moose. So put another stick on the fire an’ listen to me:

“The young are born in May, an’ the calves, generally two, follow their mother until they’re more than a year old. By that time the horns o’ the young bull have already appeared, but only as knobs. The bull doesn’t grow a full set of antlers until he’s three years old. They usually shed ’em in January or February. Sometimes a bull’s horns may measure seventy inches from tip to tip. You’ve seen what huge beasts they are, but sometimes they stand as high as seven feet at the withers, an’ weigh twelve hundred pounds. The range o’ the moose’s confined to a small area, five, ten, or perhaps fifteen miles, an’ more often a great deal less, coverin’ only a river or lake valley an’ the sur-

roundin' hills. In summer moose spend most o' their time in low country where they're much given to wadin' among lily pads, not only for the purpose o' feedin' upon the roots o' those plants, but also to free themselves from flies. Moose spend their winters in the denser woods of the hillsides, an' there, too, they're often found in yards."

"What's a moose yard like?" asked Link.

"A moose yard's usually composed of nothin' more 'an a lot o' criss-crossin' tracks, like so many intersectin' gutters, of a depth about equal to half the snow. But each gutter-like track's marked with a series o' foot-prints resemblin' small post holes, about three feet apart, an' three quarters the depth o' the snow. For in milder regions than this the snow may fall to a depth o' four or five feet. But in this part o' the country eighteen inches is about the limit. When moose spend the winter in a certain grove o' trees—though their tracks may only cover a few acres—the place is called a moose yard. The only reason moose spend the winter in such a spot is to avoid havin' to travel through deep, untrodden snow. The surroundin' trees an' shrubbery afford 'em sufficient food in the way o' browsin' upon tender bark an' twigs. The maple, birch, poplar, an' willow afford 'em their choicest winter food."

"What's the best way we boys could kill a moose?" I asked.

"Your only way o' securin' a moose, my boys, would be in case you get a chance to spear 'em as they swim, or shoot 'em with bow an' arrow if they're stalled in snow, or snare 'em with a powerful deerskin thong. I doubt, however, if you could paddle fast enough to

overhaul 'em, unless the wind an' current were in your favor. Your chance o' shootin' 'em with bow an' arrows would be mighty slim. But there'd be a better chance o' snarin' 'em later in the season, when the snow would be deep beside their runway. An' as you traveled farther south your chances would improve with th' increasin' depth of the snow."

"But if you were with us we might get some, mightn't we?" asked Link.

"Oh, yes, because when a hunter comes on moose tracks that are zigzaggin' about among the shrubbery an' trees, where the branches show signs o' havin' been freshly cropped, he knows his chances o' success are fairly good. But if he finds the footprints wide apart an' leadin' in a fairly straight line, exceptin' when curvin' to right or left in order to travel in the direction o' least resistance, the hunter realizes the moose isn't bent on feedin', but on travelin', an' in that case his chances o' success are few. From the size, depth, an' cleanness o' their footprints, and other marks in the snow, from the height above an' the distance beyond the trail that the twigs've been cropped, the hunter would not only learn how many deer there were, but he'd also get a fair idea o' their sex, ages, weights, an' sizes.

"Then again, if in followin' a certain track the hunter finds a moose has been headin' mostly up wind while it was feedin', he'll know that as soon as the deer has had enough to eat, it'll turn in the direction o' the wind, then deliberately circle down wind, an' finally come about close to its trail, where it'll lie down to rest. So



The northern bull, evidently the stronger, finding the other off guard for a moment, lurched forward and not only knocked the southern bull down, but leaped into the air to strike his enemy a smashing blow with his stiffened forelegs. The wounded moose, however, still rolling from the force of his fall, rolled completely over, and suddenly staggering to his feet, plunged into the lake and disappeared in the mist.

whether the animal's feedin' or restin', the hunter'll have to approach with great caution. For even though the moose is restin', it'll have laid down in such a way that its senses o' scent an' hearin' will warn it of an enemy approachin' down wind, while its sense o' sight will warn it of an enemy approachin' up wind. So you see, my boys, unless the moose was actually asleep, the hunter'd have to display great care an' caution.

"For instance, if the wind was comin' toward the hunter from the left, an' if he believed from signs he'd already seen that the moose was either lyin' down or quietly feedin', an' also if he judged he was now within strikin' distance, he'd circle to the right just as the moose did, not down wind, as the moose did, but up wind, in order to approach nearer the deer. An' he'd continue to circle until he either cut a new part o' the moose's trail, or until he was in danger o' allowin' the wind to carry his scent to the moose. On reachin' that point he'd retrace his own track for a little way an' then commence a new circle, but this time a smaller one.

"That's th' way he'd continue to work until he finally reached a point where he believed he'd find the deer. Then he'd approach up wind, with even greater caution, an' in order to cause the least possible noise he'd slip off his snowshoes an', stoopin' low, advance silently until he'd spy the moose. Perhaps at first he'd only see as much as an ear or the tip of its nose. Then he'd watch it with silent patience to discover whether it was asleep or awake, or whether it had heard him or not. If the moose has turned its ears in the hunter's direction, the chances are it's already alarmed, an' maybe makin'

ready for a sudden escape. But if its ears are movin' gently about in a careless way, the chances are that though the moose's awake, it hasn't scented, seen, or heard the hunter. There, my boys, that'll do for to-night, as it's already gettin' late, an' we ought to be turnin' in."

Next morning a strong southeasterly wind was blowing and there was such a sea running that it would have been dangerous to attempt traveling. So after breakfast we stretched some of the caribou skins and set to work dressing them in readiness for the making of our winter clothing and bedding. The windstorm lasting several days gave us a chance to make good headway with our work. It was growing colder all the time, and as snow threatened we made a big windbreak of brush to protect our camp, especially at night. The wind was still blowing strong on the morning of the third day since our landing on the island, and after collecting what wood we could about camp, Link and I portaged the canoe to the other side of the point, and then we paddled along the sheltered beach in search of more fuel.

When we had secured a good deal, we towed the wood back to a point opposite our camp, in order to carry it over to our fire. I was the last to leave the canoe, and rested the bow upon the beach so that it would remain secure while we carried the wood over to the fire. The warmth of the flames felt so good that Lincoln and I lingered quite a while watching the old hunter at work upon the skins before we thought of our own work, and then, when we did return in sight of the northern beach, my heart sank within me. I saw our canoe drifting away. The wind and water had worked it loose.

I raised a shout for Bill. I knew we were done for now, and when the old man saw what had happened, he just looked sad, shook his head, and said:

"It's too late—there's no chance in the world—for even if we could swim that far, we couldn't overhaul her at the rate she's driftin'."

Lincoln, too, was overwhelmed with despair. Occasionally I had imagined I was pretty much of a fool, but now I knew it was true. I was filled with shame and regret. Already the wind had driven our canoe many hundreds of yards from shore, and helplessly we stood there watching it growing smaller and smaller as it raced away to where dark leaden clouds met the dark leaden waters on the distant rim of the lake, and beyond which, perhaps twenty miles away, lay the far north-western shore. Tired of standing, old Bill went back to his work upon the skins, but we boys sat upon the sand and silently and sadly watched our fast-vanishing canoe drift entirely out of view.

CHAPTER XII

OUR TRAPPING TRAIL

COME, my boys, there's no use feelin' bad—it can't be helped now; an', anyway, we would've had to give her up pretty soon on account of the freeze-up," the old hunter consoled.

I was so worried over the loss of our canoe that I had not noticed that a snow flurry had already arrived; and when I joined Bill I meekly asked:

"How'll we get off the island now?"

"We'll build a raft, my son, an' when we find a good campin' place on the mainland we'll stay there an' continue our work while we're waitin' for the freeze-up. What with tannin' skins, makin' moccasins an' winter clothin', as well as snowshoes an' sleds, we'll have plenty to keep us busy. An' we had better start at once to build the raft, otherwise ice may overtake us any day an' perhaps be too thick for us to navigate through it an' yet too thin for us to walk on it. In that case we might be held prisoners here for many a day."

Banking our fire, we covered our packs with brush in case it snowed harder, and then we set off in search of logs. Armed with our bows and arrows, we followed the shore on the sheltered or northern side, as that was the only side on which we could build our raft. Whenever we found any suitable driftwood stranded on the

bank, we rolled it into water and moored it with a thong. By noon we had found enough to answer our purpose. During the afternoon we towed all our logs to a little bay which was the nearest sheltered spot to our camp. By evening there were several inches of snow, and it was miserably cold work, especially on account of our clothing becoming wet. But the rough windbreak we made with green caribou skins kept us warm as we sat in the glow of the fire.

Next morning we made a fire on the northern beach so we could occasionally warm ourselves while at the wet work of building the raft. This time the old voyageur devised a better way of propelling the craft, as the lake was too deep for poling. The raft was made much in the same way as our first one, except that the center log was a tree trunk with a long, upturned branch that Bill lashed to the traverse bars in such a way that the branch stood up about four feet above the raft and thus afforded a convenient support against which to lash a mast. Roughly, the raft measured about ten by twenty-five feet, and was therefore large enough and strong enough to carry sail. At the stern Bill lashed together some crossed poles to form a support for a steering sweep.

For a sweep the old hunter selected a straight, slender tree trunk about twenty feet long, with two thin forked roots, over which he stretched some deerskin to form a blade. Provided with a couple of long, slender poles with which to propel the craft in shallow water, we all got aboard and poled round the point to the beach in front of our camp. As the wind had now swung round in the direction of the nearest mainland, the old hunter

thought we ought to start at once, in case the wind changed again or dropped.

"We'd better not even wait to eat," he added.

So while he rigged a sail in readiness to hoist, we boys loaded the raft. Upon green deerskins spread hair side up on the raft's raised flooring of poles we piled our packs, and covering them with skins we lashed the pile securely. In a birchbark box filled with sand Bill buried live coals in order to keep a fire going in case the wind veered, or we were becalmed and had to cook while on board. For the same purpose we had a supply of dry wood. When the mast was guyed with thongs and everything was in readiness, we poled out into the wind and Bill hauled aloft the horizontal boom to which were tied the two deerskins that formed our primitive sail, and away we drifted down the lake.

At sunset the wind almost died, so we cooked and ate our supper as we slowly drifted along. Later we passed among some islands and finding one standing in our way we landed on it, but only to stretch our legs and gather a little more firewood. Poling around to the other side, we imagined we could see the mainland ahead of us, but the light was so dim Bill thought we had better not attempt to cross that night, as the wind might shift and carry us too far from shore. Mooring our raft to overhanging trees, we slept for several hours among our bundles and bales.

Some time before dawn I awoke. Lincoln was still asleep, but Bill was sitting up and we were sailing down the lake under a moonlit sky. I dozed again. Soon after dawn the old hunter called me to help pole the raft round a point of the mainland. The wind, having

once more shifted, now drove us farther along the eastern beach and headed us for the distant southern shore. Hoisting sail again, we drifted clear of little reedy bays and rocky points. Headway was made until mid-afternoon, when we were becalmed for several hours. At twilight a friendly breeze gently drove us past a high rocky bluff and into a delightful little bay on the southern shore. The narrow rocky entrance and the inner tree-covered shoreline so greatly pleased the old hunter that he poled for a little cove where a small creek ran into the beautiful little bay, and there we moored our raft for the night.

In the morning we not only found that the little bay afforded a secluded and charming camping place, but the surrounding country impressed the old woodsman as a good game region, and he decided to stay there and wait for the freeze-up. Ducks and geese and gulls and swans were swimming hither and thither, and sporting about the bay, or on the lake just beyond the narrows. Among the trees we erected a lean-to frame which we covered with deerskins and in front of which we kindled a fire. An abundance of dry fallen trees lay among the rocks at the narrows, and were to be had as fuel by merely towing them across the bay. That night before we sat down to supper we had also stored our provisions and skins upon two stages, out of harm's way.

"To-morrow, my boys, try for some ducks an' geese with your bows an' arrows. I'm goin' to tow over a pile o' that dry wood, because this bay's so sheltered it may freeze over when hit by the first cold wave. Then we'd have to carry the wood all the way round the shore. Besides, there's the skins to finish an' the birchwood

to get for the makin' of our snowshoes an' toboggans. After that I'll lay out a fur path."

"What's a fur path?" inquired Link.

"A fur path is what a trapper calls the trail along which he sets his line o' traps an' deadfalls for the catchin' o' fur-bearin' animals. It'll take quite a bit o' work, but you'll like the job; an' if you do your work well, you'll have some fur to sell when you hit the tradin' post. Perhaps enough to pay your way home."

Link and I didn't have much luck shooting ducks and geese—we only bagged a drake; but we did have a lot of fun pegging away at them with our bows and arrows. It was certainly good practice. I was now getting to be a pretty good shot, but it was Link that hit the drake.

That night, while we were comfortably toasting ourselves before the fire, old Bill mused: "My boys, when in the livin' forest always be careful o' fire, or in a single day you may destroy a hundred years o' the work of God."

"Bill, this morning you were speaking about trapping. What kind of animals do you expect to catch around here?" Lincoln asked.

"Oh, we might count on some mink an' marten, a fisher or two, a few foxes, a lot o' muskrats, perhaps a wolf, a bear or two, an' a number o' beaver. There's a beaver dam a little way up this creek. That means a beaver house somewhere near."

"I don't know mink; I've never seen one," I said. "What are they like?"

"Gordon, my boy, if you knew mink, you'd remember it's always lookin' for trouble; always tryin' to get



When the mast was guyed with thongs and everything was in readiness, we poled out into the wind and Bill hauled aloft the horizontal boom to which were tied the two deerskins that formed our primitive sail, and away we drifted down the lake. At sunset the wind almost died, so we cooked and ate our supper as we drifted along.

into a scrap, always ready to fight, day or night, winter or summer, on land or in the water. You'd remember, too, that it gets its food by swimmin' or runnin' and that it's a dirty feeder. By that I mean it'll eat either fresh or rotten fish. It also eats both flesh an' fowl. In fact, its food includes everything it has the agility to catch an' the strength to kill, whether on land or in the water. An' the mink's favorite sport is killin' muskrats regardless of whether or not he needs 'em for food.

"When the mink travels on land he's ever on the watch, forever lookin' round, an' he's very inquisitive, too, an' if you place a stick in the ground tipped with a rag o' white or red, he'll stop an' watch it for a while, then sneak up quietly to examine it from many points o' view. But if the rag's blue or green, he'll not bother about it at all. It's surprisin' how fast he can run, an' even more surprisin' how fast he can swim; for he can even leap into a brook an' overtake a speckled trout. In winter he'll follow muskrat runs beneath th' ice, an' if th' inhabitants are out on his enterin' their house, he'll wait until they return an' kill 'em every one. In winter, too, he'll sometimes hunt muskrats by burrowin' through the thinner south side o' their house above th' ice line. Later on, if the trapper calls that way, he may find nothin' but a pile o' muskrat bones in the little home.

"The young o' the mink are born in spring, usually four or six, seldom in odd numbers, but often more females than males. As a rule they're born in bank burrows, though sometimes in deserted muskrat houses. The mink is not much of a tree climber, though he can

go up trunks with rough bark or ascend slantin' stage poles, as I know well from past experience. For he's a thief an' is always ready to rob a hunter's stage. The more stormy the weather, the more the mink likes to travel, therefore that's a good time to look out for him, even in winter."

"How do mink act when caught in a trap?" asked Link.

"When caught in a trap, mink often hiss loudly. His regular call isn't guttural like a bear's, but more of a nasal sound or whistle. If once pinched in a trap called a deadfall, the mink'll not try to enter from the back as a wolverine'll do. But he'll enter from the top rather than run the risk o' gettin' pinched again by enterin' from the front. Should he have been caught in a trap an' then made his escape, it's wiser to set a different kind o' trap if you expect to catch the same mink, as he has a good memory."

"How does a mink hunt?" I asked.

"He hunts mostly up and down river, makin' use of otter an' beaver runways, an' he seldom travels far unless driven away. He'll follow the wolverine's tracks for the purpose o' pickin' up whatever may be left o' the wolverine's feast. He'll eat it too, regardless of the stinkin' odor the wolverine may have left to protect it for himself. But that's only to be expected, as the mink's smell's still worse. About th' only small animal a mink won't attack is the skunk, because the skunk casts a stink that's too offensive for even a mink to stand."

"What's a mink track look like?" Link asked.

"Its tracks are quite round, an' more often showin'

only four of its five toes. The mink travels more by leapin' than by walkin'. Young mink are very playful, much like kittens of the house cat, though they don't stay home very long, as they go huntin' on their own account, even when quite young, but not for any long distance.

"Though th' owl won't tackle a mink in the woods, it'll go for him in th' open, or on ice, always tryin' to catch him by the back o' the neck; an' though the mink may struggle desperately, he has little chance o' fightin' free. That's why mink usually cross an open space on the run, as th' owl may be watchin' for him. Ravens an' hawks go for him, too, but there're no hawks down here in the winter. I've told you that the mink's a good swimmer, an' I might add that much that applies to th' otter also applies to the mink. Such, for instance, as walkin' beneath the water on the bottom of a river. Though I've never seen a mink catch a fish in th' act o' jumpin' a cascade, I once saw it done by an otter."

"But, Bill, you've never told us about otters," I reminded him.

"Oh, yes, that's true, Gordon. I was forgettin' that, so I'll tell you about otters some other time, as it's too late to-night."

Milder weather greeted us next morning, and by noon we had a big heap of dry birch and spruce and pine piled beside our camp. Most of the wood we gathered was fallen timber, but even the standing wood we took was easily uprooted from the little more than moss that covered the rocks upon which it stood. Then for several days we worked on our deerskins, and as soon as enough were in readiness, the cutting out and the sew-

ing together of our hairy winter clothing began. Likewise we worked on smoke-tanned hairless skins for our moccasins and mittens. Deerskin caps were also made. True the cut and sewing of our hooded coats and hip-high leggings were rather crude, but when we tried on our new garments over our old clothes we felt we could stand any winter weather that might happen along. One morning at breakfast the old hunter complained:

“I’m tired o’ scrapin’ an’ stretchin’ an’ tannin’ an’ sewin’, an’ now that we’ve got our clothin’ in pretty good shape, I want a change o’ work. To-day let’s start layin’ out our trappin’ trail. To begin with, we must hunt for a place where rabbits are plentiful. For there we’re likely to find signs o’ foxes, lynx, an’ wolves. The best region in which to set marten traps is a hilly district timbered with spruce an’ pine, but with little underbrush. In swampy places, or where there’re small creeks an’ little lakes, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, an’ fisher are usually found.”

On reaching the foot of the partially wooded hillside that stood to the south of our camp we came upon a perfect maze of rabbit runways, and there, too, we saw signs of foxes. A little later old Bill announced:

“There are lynx here, too, an’ I’m goin’ to set some snares for ’em.”

First he drove a stake into the ground, hung part of a duck upon it, and scattered a few feathers around. Then he cut a number of sticks about five feet long and an inch thick, driving them into the ground a couple of inches apart in the form of a circle about five feet across. Then he slanted them toward the center and thatched the little stockade with evergreen boughs. An opening

of about ten inches was left on one side, and in this was set a deerskin snare attached to a strong tossing pole. The loop was placed just high enough for a lynx conveniently to push its head through. It was a fine-looking trap, and when it was finished we passed on to set other snares. At another likely place Bill asked us boys to set the next snare, as he said we ought to know how to set all kinds of snares and deadfalls, as well as be able to use a bow and arrow with skill, if we intended to become hunters.

"Some Indians hunt lynx by callin' 'em," he further explained. "They imitate either its screechin' or its whistlin'. For the lynx makes a queer kind o' whistlin' sound, but not many Indians can hunt 'em that way, as it takes long practice to become a good caller.

"My sons," he continued, "when travelin' through a well-timbered, swampy country o' pine an' spruce you may chance to see either on the ground or in a tree a larger animal than the mink or the marten. In fact, it's even a little larger an' heavier than the red fox, an' if its coat's a grizzly, dark brown with a black tip to its fox-like tail, you may safely call it a fisher or a pekan. The fisher's a very strong, active animal, the largest of the marten tribe, an' he spends about half his time among the branches o' the trees. He lives on flesh, fish, or fowl, as well as on fruit, seeds, an' eggs.

"The young, usually two to four, are born in spring, often high up in a hollow tree. The fisher snarls, growls, whistles, an' sometimes makes a noise somewhat like a cryin' child. His footprints are a good deal like a mink's, but of course very much larger, while th' underside of his foot is more hairy. He has an ungainly

gait when walkin', an' every little while he'll resort to a few long springs, then continue walkin' again. He's more active in a tree than even the red squirrel, so you can form some idea of his ability as a climber, an' when he descends the trunk of a tree he comes down head first. He's also a fair swimmer. The skin o' the male's larger than that o' the female, though the latter's fur is more often o' greater value, as the hair's much more silky. The fur o' the female's as fine a fur as you could wish to wear. But while the tail o' the fisher's very long, unusually long in comparison with its body, an' though it's quite bushy, it's rather a scraggy tail an' not o' much beauty."

Continuing our way through the forest we occasionally stopped to build a deadfall or set another snare. The old hunter fashioned the deadfalls like a three-sided stockade. A long, heavy timber whose butt was enclosed between the face of the opening and two posts was kept in a raised position at one end by a combination of little sticks, on one of which was fastened the bait. The withdrawal of the bait would cause the timber or drop log to fall upon the sill log and crush the life out of the unfortunate animal caught therein. He built the deadfalls in various sizes to catch, not only the fox, but the marten, the mink, the fisher, the otter, the bear, the wolf, and the beaver. He used different kinds of bait such as fish and the flesh of ducks, geese, and grouse. It took him four days to complete his fur path.

So while waiting for the freeze-up we had little time for anything but work, and every day we were busily engaged until bedtime. The season advanced so rapidly that we had to set about making our snowshoes and

toboggans without delay, in order that our outfit should be in readiness as soon as the swamps and rivers and lakes would be strongly frozen and the depth of the snow suitable for snowshoe travel.

Using a wooden club as a mallet with which to drive his knife through the wood, old Bill split several long birch sticks into slats about four inches wide and half-an-inch thick, of which he selected three for the building of a toboggan for himself. Before bending the slats into shape for the head of the sled, he shaved them thinner at that end and tapered the outer edges of the two outside slats toward the tail end, so that while the sled measured about twelve inches across the widest part, the tail end measured eleven. Then again, from the widest part, where the second traverse bar was placed, he tapered the head so that at the curved tip it measured only eight inches. Then he marked where he would place the four traverse bars, one at each end and two toward the center, and accordingly he bored many holes, but always in pairs, through the slats with a bone awl.

On the bottom sides of the slats he cut grooves across the wood connecting the pairs of holes, so that when the traverse bars were lashed on with deer sinew the strain would come across the grain of the wood and yet the sinews would lie beneath the surface of the wood and thus be free from wear. After soaking the more tapered ends of the slats—the bow ends—he worked them over his knee until they were pliable enough to make the desired curve. Then he bound the four traverse bars into position, forced the prow into the proper curve, and lashed it into place. The hauling loops—attached

to the second traverse bar—and the lashing lines—attached to the three last bars—were next adjusted, and thus he built a strong, light, serviceable toboggan about seven feet in length. Later he made two more toboggans, each about six feet long, for Lincoln and me.

The old hunter also made our snowshoe frames of birchwood and used thin caribou thongs for the mesh, which he soaked in water before lacing into place with the aid of a wooden needle having an eye in the middle, instead of at one end. Bill's snowshoes were about five feet in length while ours were about four.

The coming of winter was of great interest to us boys. Never before had we had such an opportunity to see nature in all her various moods, from the turning of the somber summer greens of the forest into a gloriously beautiful mantle of gorgeously enchanting colors that one day seemed to vanish with but a few hours' breeze, as if taking wing southward with the great flocks of wild fowl that flew overhead. Later, the gray, bare branches of the trees became so coated with icy crystals that the diameter of every tiny twig was increased tenfold, and when the sun shone on them, one's delighted eyes grew dim from the overpowering beauty of its dazzling splendor. And eventually we witnessed the locking of the rivers and lakes and the coming of the heavy snows.

Now for the first time in our lives we boys really began to study nature and to try to read every white page of that enchanting book on life in the Great Northern Forest. It had been snowing off and on for the past week, and already the ground was covered to the depth of nearly a foot. It was now four days since we had

visited our traps, and as Lincoln had already had some practice at snowshoeing, we started out early the following morning to go the round of our fur path.

It was a brilliant day, and while the forest's great white mantle was ablaze with sunlight, its underlying shadows formed a charming harmony of blue and green, violet and lavender. Here and there, as we tramped through the woods, we saw many curious imprints upon the forest's soft carpet, and as Link and I eagerly inquired their meaning, the old hunter never wearied of telling every story he read in the snow.

"Those, I know, are rabbits', but what is this one here?" Lincoln asked as we came to the bank of a little frost-locked stream.

"That's the track of a mink," Bill replied.

"Let's follow it and see where it goes," I suggested.

As we went along, we soon found the marks spread wider apart, for the animal had evidently broken into a run, as Bill explained. Farther on the trail showed that the little creature had rushed forward in leaps and bounds toward another series of tracks that the old half-breed said were those of an ermine that had happened to be passing that way. Evidently it had not realized that it was being pursued. Where their tracks intersected, the snow told of a woodland tragedy. A desperate fight had taken place. Each had fought long and hard to kill the other, for both white hair and brown lay strewn about. Blood also showed upon the snow. The largest blotch of blood told where the weaker of the two had lost its life, and the single trail leading away from that fatal spot showed how the victor had carried off upon his back the body of the vanquished.

And seeing that none but the mink's tracks led away, Link sighed:

"Poor little beggar!" Then he coaxed: "Bill, tell us about ermine."

"My boy, you needn't waste much sympathy on him. He's a vicious little robber an' will tackle almost anything regardless o' size. Yet he's easily caught because he's so stupid that if his head's covered an' he can't see you, he thinks he's safe. When he fights he more often tries for the back o' the neck than for the throat of his enemy, as he can hold on there and suck its blood with less chance o' bein' injured. He hunts muskrats, squirrels, chipmunks, an' mice, as well as partridge, ptarmigan, an' other birds. The Indians say he uses the black tip of his white tail as a decoy when huntin' birds. The fox sometimes uses his tail in the same way to attract ducks ashore.

"The ermine's a most determined hunter an' seldom loses his quarry. He can scent mice through deep snow an' digs down to get 'em out. He can travel nearly as fast beneath soft snow as he can above it. That's true, too, of the mink an' otter."

"Can an ermine climb a tree?" I asked.

"Yes, my boy, about as easily as he can walk on the ground. When he hunts a bird in a tree, he'll sometimes go up on the far side o' the trunk an' then creep out on th' underside of the limb, so the bird won't see him. Should the bird show alarm, he may poke up the tip of his tail beside the branch so that the bird seein' it may become curious as to what it really is, an' thus give th' ermine a better chance o' securin' its prey. At least, that's what he seems to do, though perhaps it's

only accident that he flicks his tail at the bird. But when there're a number o' birds in a tree he always tries for the lowest one first. Whether or not he does that from design, I don't know. An' should he kill a number o' birds he'll drag 'em away, one at a time, by seizin' the bird by the neck an' carryin' its body over his back.

"But if the snow's too deep for him to carry away his game, he'll dig a hole an' bury his catch right there. Then, like the skunk, he'll befoul the spot so as to keep other animals from stealin' his cache. The ermine's always ready to tackle a mink or a marten, but nearly always gets killed. He'll even tackle man, an' can jump four or five feet. So, my boys, be careful if you approach an ermine at bay. He's a natural-born robber an' a regular little devil to fight, as he seldom runs away. He's a good swimmer an' will in that way cross a big river, though he may make use of a floatin' stick on which to rest his chin or forefeet while he shoves away with his hind legs. Once I saw an ermine swimmin' in that way across the great Mackenzie River."

Continuing our way, we came upon a very curious-looking trail in the snow, the like of which I had never seen or heard of before. It was a long, winding, rounded, gutter-like impression about nine inches wide and five inches deep. It looked as if a great serpent had passed that way.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAILING OF OUTLAWS

WHEN I asked the old hunter what had caused it, he said it had been made by an otter shoving itself through the snow.

“If you look a little closer you’ll see th’ prints of his hind legs, though his broad tail has partly blurred ’em. When goin’ down hill th’ otter lays his forelegs alongside his body, gives a shove with his hind legs, an’ away he glides down th’ incline like a toboggan—except when he curves his body to steer clear of obstructions.”

“Bill, let’s sit down here in the sun while you tell us more about otters,” I suggested.

“You rascal,” the old man smiled; “always ready an’ willin’ to loaf an’ be entertained. However, my boys, the Canada otter’s an animal I knew you’d be glad to study, as his ways are very interestin’ an’ he makes a delightful pet. His home’s usually a burrow in a river bank with an entrance below water line. The nest in which the young are reared is lined with dry grass or leaves, especially the leaves from the tips o’ little willows or little poplars. But the mother an’ father seldom sleep together, as they’re great snorers—in fact, even worse than beavers. Frequently their home’s ventilated by a hole above, but in winter it’s rather a dangerous thing. Hoar frost is apt to form around the

ventilator's mouth an' becomes a regular tell-tale to the hunter. It also helps his dog to get a whiff of scent of th' otter below. That's one reason why th' Indian likes to have a dog with him when he's otter huntin' in winter.

"The young, numberin' from one to six, but usually two or three, are born in early spring. The father helps the mother in carin' for 'em, often bringin' fish to her when she's too busy to leave the den, or watchin' over the young when the mother takes a turn in the river and catches a few o' the finny tribe herself. If danger threatens the mother or the young, the father'll fight to the death to defend 'em. An Indian friend o' mine, who's given much time to the study of otters, told me that both the mother an' the father will sometimes moan an' groan when one o' their young has been killed, just as a mother bear'll do. But a mother bear'll sometimes do even more—she'll shed real tears.

"When an otter dies in its home, the rest o' the family may stay there a week or more, an' then, instead o' removin' the dead from the den, they'll themselves move away an' hunt for new quarters while they leave the dead in possession o' their old home. The beaver, however, he says, acts differently, an' not only removes the dead from their home, but they even carry it far enough away to allow the current to catch it an' carry it off.

"Th' otter's a clean feeder, an' not only is he particular about what he eats, but he'll also clean himself after finishin' his meal. He's not fond o' jack fish, nor does he care much for sturgeon, louche, or pickerel, but he's very fond o' trout, whitefish, an' goldeyes. Th' observant hunter knows from where th' otter had been feedin' just what he had been huntin' for. He's also fond o'

clams an' will sometimes collect a pile as big as an ant hill, but apparently he piles 'em up just for sport. He occasionally eats the tender tips o' roots, the tips o' young bulrushes when in the buddin' stage, an' what is locally called 'water onions,' which're found in muddy banks. Because they're sweet, th' Indian likes 'em, too, an' when dried he pounds 'em into flour.

"Every once in a while the good hunter wants to change his huntin' ground, because th' animals, gettin' wary of him, move away. Th' otter's apt to do the same thing, an' in his travels he may cover many miles, followin' the same stream, or he may head across country to make his new home in another fishin' region. In a locality that's not been hunted by man, the game may be quite fearless an' not only stop to look at him, but even go nearer to get a better view. But if fired at or hunted in other ways, th' animals soon learn to keep out o' the hunter's sight."

"How fast can an otter swim?" Link asked.

"I don't know just how fast, but he's a wonder for speed. He can swim so swiftly an' dodge with such skill that he can overtake not only the speckled trout but also the salmon. When he enters the water he doesn't make a great splash like the beaver when it slaps the water with its tail, but he goes in more like a seal. In fact, his entrance is almost noiseless. When he comes out, he doesn't have to shake himself like a dog or bear to dry his coat, as his fur seems to retain only enough water to make his coat look glossy.

"Boys, th' otter's an extremely playful animal, an' good-natured too. One game otters seem fond o' playin' is a sort o' hide-an'-seek among submerged logs an'

stranded driftwood. Another game's slidin' down hill, toboggan fashion, in both winter an' summer; in fact, th' otter's one o' the most playful of all Canadian animals. The otter's sight's very keen, his hearin' also good, an' though he has a keen scent, he hasn't much use for it. As the males do most o' the huntin', they're more often killed. That no doubt's one reason why there're nearly twice as many females.

"When the otter hunts for fish he usually works up stream, as strong currents force the fish to take to eddies or to rest awhile in the slack water behind large stones. In such huntin' th' otter, instead o' swimmin' up the strong current, actually walks on the bottom o' the river. While engaged in such work, he can remain under water for four or five minutes, perhaps more. Then he comes to the top again, an' swimmin' with head held high, he refreshes his lungs as he drifts to another likely-lookin' eddy, an' then he sinks once more. At a strong rapids th' otter may hunt in a different way, that is, as a bear'll do, from a rock in the stream. Then, again, th' otter may look for a shoal where he may see the fish flappin' among the half-submerged stones, an' there he'll catch 'em in the shallows. There's still another place where he likes to hunt fish, an' that's in the pools where fish often resort to rest before they make a violent attempt to ascend a cascade."

"Is the otter much of a fighter?" I asked.

"You bet he is. His strong body's almost as supple as a snake's. I've watched 'em fightin'. An otter defends himself in three different ways, either by squattin' upon his haunches an' strikin' with his forefeet, or by

standin' upon his hind legs an' tail an' bitin' an' strikin', or by throwin' himself on his back an' usin' all four sets o' claws as well as his teeth—as a wolverine'll do. But while an otter tries to bite his opponent's tail, he tries to protect his own. For that reason an otter may be seen with his tail curved beneath him when he goes into battle.

“The otter when he wants to be is not only very active but very vicious. When the fight's long an' he's growin' weaker, he may draw back, then suddenly dive, toboggan fashion, toward his enemy, endeavoring to bite him on the belly, where his hair's short. Sometimes, too, they may both leap together at the same moment, an' when they clinch they remind me o' human beings—clawin', bitin', an' rollin' over an' over in their effort to win the battle. They also try to bite each other just above the nostrils, holdin' on with their teeth an' chewin' away like a bulldog'll do. Meanwhile, th' other otter tries for his enemy's forepaws, for, like all water animals, th' otter's very tender in the front feet. If bitten there he'll let go his hold. If a certain man's a good swimmer, Indians'll say he swims like a beaver; but if a man's a good wrestler, Indians'll say he's almost as active an' strong as an otter.

“Even in summer time an otter's trail's easy to follow because it's usually well worn by th' animal constantly goin' in an' out o' water. He likes to spend part of his time on a river bench, from which he may have a well-beaten runway to the water. Though the print o' the mink's foot may only show four o' his five toes, th' otter's track more often shows five. When not disturbed th' otter walks slowly with footprints close to-



Thus we moved along examining everything, and discussing many things we saw and heard. Here we saw where an owl had swooped at a squirrel, but the little animal leaping aside, the owl had missed its prey and struck the snow. There some martens had been playing. Yonder we observed where a fox had flushed a ptarmigan from its wintry bed beneath the snow, and caught it, too.

gether, whereas, when pursued, or in a hurry to get away—especially if there's snow on the ground—he'll take a few leaps an' then toboggan for a little distance, then spring again. If descendin' a slope he'll slide as much as he can. In the winter time, too, when he's pursued, he may dive beneath the soft snow an' travel out o' sight for some little distance in an effort to escape. There, my boys, I've told you about th' otter, so let's get back to our work, or we won't get much done to-day."

Thus we moved along examining everything, and discussing many things we saw and heard. Here we observed where a fox had flushed a ptarmigan from its wintry bed beneath the snow. There we saw where an owl had swooped at a squirrel, but the little animal leaping aside, the owl had missed its prey and struck the snow. Yonder some martens had been playing. Along a little snow-mantled stream a lynx had been in hot pursuit of a rabbit, and farther along we saw where three wolves had taken after a lynx. It made me wonder if it was the same lynx that had chased the rabbit. Every little while the old hunter read us a fascinating story from the snow.

The locality proved to be well supplied with forest creatures, not only with the smaller fur-bearing animals, but also with big game, and by the time we had made the third round of our trapping path, we had secured a fair amount of fur, among which was an unusually handsome cross fox. During the second week in camp we found many signs of wolves and were frequently awakened by their howling. Though the stage stood near our lean-to, Bill feared lest the brutes might break

it down and steal the food stored upon it for our overland journey. To keep the wolves away, he stuffed several deerskins with brush, attached broken deer horns, and hung the deerskins in such a way that the skins swayed about in the wind, and rattled the horns so loudly that the wolves dared not approach.

It was now the nineteenth day of our stay on the southern shore of Wolverine Lake. The ice on the waterways was now sufficiently thick to afford safe travel in any direction, and the snow was deep enough for fair snowshoeing and sledding. Bill had already thought of breaking camp and starting on our long snowshoe journey. But there was still the deerskin shelter to make. He had left it to the last.

That afternoon, while attending our traps, our fur path led us to where it took a turn for a mile or two toward the south; then it continued westward and homeward again, as Bill had laid it out somewhat in the form of an oval. We were then about three miles east of our camp, and as the turning was made in a valley, Bill left the trapping trail and led us to the top of a neighboring hill to see the eastern country beyond, as he thought it might afford an easier course for us to follow on our southward journey. No sooner had we reached the eastern brow of the hill than we saw a much-broken thread of brilliant white—broken where the trees hid it—and it followed the course of a winding little snow-covered creek that ran through the valley before us. Instantly we knew it to be a snowshoe trail. The sight thrilled us. After a few words of caution, Bill led us down the hillside toward it.

When we arrived at the trail, all that we boys could



THE HUNG HUNTER
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THE TRAILING OF OUTLAWS

read from it was that it had been made by two men who had worn snowshoes, the like of which we had never seen. After examining the track, the old man said:

“It’s the trail o’ two men southward bound that we can plainly see. They’re carryin’ packs. They were here about an hour ago. An’ it’s up to us to find them.”

strangers had done. But the reason the strangers had halted there was to make a fire and cook their lunch, all of which we could see at a glance.

"Stay where you are, my boys, as I want to look around a bit before we make too many tracks," and with that the old half-breed slipped off his snowshoes in order to disturb less snow—or rather he slipped his feet out, as the Northern Indians do. They also put them on without having to untie or tie the thongs.

After satisfying himself with a careful examination of the dead fire, the little brush mattress upon which the men had sat while cooking their meal, and the marks and signs in the snow, even going so far off as the dead trees from which the strangers had chopped their firewood, Bill said:

"Now, boys, read aloud the signs you see."

So Lincoln and I started in to investigate.

"That's where they stood their snowshoes in the snow, toes up and well away from the fire," I proudly proclaimed.

"Right," replied Bill.

"They had an ax. I can tell by the way that tree is cut," Lincoln announced.

"True."

"They had a knife, too. For look at this bark on this little stick. It's been whittled with a sharp blade," I added.

"Right again."

"And they carried packs," Lincoln continued, "for there are the marks where they set them down. That mark there looks as if it had been made by a falling tump-line."

"My boys, you're gettin' on. Now tell me what kind o' footgear they wore besides their snowshoes."

"That's easy," smiled Link, "moccasins, of course."

"Yes, but what kind o' moccasins?"

"Now you've got me. I don't know," replied Link.

"I'll give it up too," I added.

"What else do you see?" old Bill asked; and we both replied that that was all.

"Then tell me what kind o' men they were?" requested the old hunter.

That was a stickler. But remembering Bill had claimed that the first tracks we had discovered along the shores of the River of the Strange People were those of Indians, and that he expected to come upon them again, I replied:

"They were Indians."

"Right, my boy, but tell me why?"

"You've got me there," I grinned, and Link laughingly said:

"Now, Bill, tell us what you've learned."

"In the first place, you boys remarked on a sign that you only half read, an' that was the little willow that'd been whittled near the fire. In the Strong Woods Country nearly all men smoke. But they don't smoke cigars or cigarettes. The pipe's universal. Yet while nearly all white men smoke, many of 'em chew. But th' Indian rarely ever does that, as tobacco to him seems too valuable to be used that way. If he runs short o' tobacco to smoke, he counts on smokin' just the same, as he makes use o' several substitutes that're rarely ever used by white men. For instance, th' inner bark of the red willow's one, an' that little stick o' red

willow the thickness of a man's finger that you found beside the fire shows that th' outer bark'd been shaved off very thin, an' th' inner bark scraped into a fringe o' little coils that encircled the stick. Then it'd been placed before the fire to toast a little, after which th' inner bark was rubbed off an' powdered in the hand before placin' it in the pipe. That's what these men had been doin' with that little stick, and it not only proves they had no tobacco, but also goes a long way to prove they were Indians.

"Then again, my sons, you see there's a number o' places where these men have stepped about without their snowshoes, yet you failed to read anythin' from that. In the first place, as you probably know, th' average Indian treads straight. Rarely ever does he turn out his toes as most white men do. Yet he's seldom pigeon toed, as white men so often try to make out when they write books about him. All these marks were made by men who treaded straight. Furthermore, I asked you what kind o' footgear they wore, an' you said moccasins an' nothin' more. True, they were wearin' moccasins, but if you'll examine more carefully you'll find that the toe marks of their moccasins show that the point o' the toe was not opposite the center o' the foot, as they would have been if made by Ojibway moccasins. But they're pointed opposite the big toe, provin' that they were wearin' moccasins o' the Cree style, known as 'mitten moccasins.' Mitten moccasins have no seam over the toe; therefore they're best for snowshoein'. Judgin' from that sign, I believe the men were Crees.

"You were right about these men havin' an ax an' a

knife. But you didn't say how they're armed. They haven't any gun, or we'd have seen some sign of where they stood it upright in the snow well back from the fire, so that the heat wouldn't make it necessary for 'em to dry it an' oil it again. But they did have bows an' arrows, as that sign there plainly proves where one man, in takin' off his pack, pressed his quiver in the snow. The print of th' outer end of his bow shows as you see it there.

"They're usin' caribou robes. See the hair marks there beside where a pack made that impression. Why, there's even some o' the hair. You know how brittle it is. But there's still another sign you overlooked. You didn't notice what kind o' snowshoes they're wearin'. You've been lookin' at th' impressions o' their shoes for a number o' miles. Don't you see they're different from ours? If you compare their marks with ours, you'll see that, though the heels of our shoes always drag upon the snow, theirs rarely do. The reason is that ours have long pointed heels, while theirs are rounded at the back, and are also so short the heel lifts instead o' drags when they step. They're wearin' the kind o' snowshoes that're called 'bear paws,' a mere hurried makeshift of a shoe, made with a single stick bent into the form of an oval, an' with but a single cross bar. They're strung with coarser deerskin than ours. A 'bear paw' shoe's used merely to carry a stranded hunter to his home camp, where he can procure a proper pair o' snowshoes, such, for instance, as ours.

"The two men who passed this way are lazy young Crees who don't take as much pride in their work as they should. You boys know 'em both. They be-

longed to the crew o' Perkins's freight canoe. They've escaped from the white men whose six-fathom canoe was, as you saw, burnt on the bank o' the Eennu Sepe. An' now that these Indians are once more free, they're tryin' to keep clear of O'Brien an' his cutthroat gang."

"What! O'Brien and his gang?" Lincoln exclaimed.

"Well—I'm makin' a guess at it—but it won't be long before I'll prove it to you. So now, my boys, let's go back to camp an' get a little rest before we set out to overtake th' Indian lads. For we must overhaul 'em before they've a chance to travel far to-morrow."

It was some time after midnight when we arrived, tired and hungry, at our camp, but after plenty to eat and drink—snow being melted in a birchbark rogan set beside the fire—we boys were in a talkative mood. We asked the old hunter many a question, especially about trailing men, as he had told us that on many occasions he had been engaged as a Special Constable of the Northwest Mounted Police to trail outlaws.

"My boys, when a trailer's after outlaws, one o' the first things he wants to know is, how're they armed? Sometimes that can be found out fairly soon by little signs the trailer may find, such as a gun shell or two, a gun wad, an impression of the butt of a gun on the ground or in the snow, a bit of rag, a bit of skin, a few feathers, or some moss that's been used to clean a gun. As to readin' man's footprints, I didn't mention this afternoon all the differences between a white man's an' an Indian's footmarks.

"The print of an Indian's foot's usually broad at the toe, as most o' his weight comes upon the ball of the foot, an' his steps shorter than the white man's. The white

man's toe is narrower on account of his foot bein' spoilt by wearin' shoes, an' most o' his weight falls upon the heel. Besides, the white man's much more careless than th' Indian, an' walks heavily, often steppin' upon sticks an' stones. Whereas th' Indian walks lightly an' tries to avoid makin' a noise. An experienced Indian trailer can, as a rule, read the difference between the footprints of an Indian an' those of a white man before he's followed the trail twenty paces.

"One advantage in followin' the trail of a man over that of an animal is that the man's not nearly so apt, as an animal would be, to smell the trailer. But when trailin' a man, the trailer must remember not only to be on his guard in front, but also on guard behind, as the man may circle an' watch his trail to see if he's bein' followed. Sometimes, however, that's even done by animals. Then again, a trailer may observe how an outlaw's securin' his food by watchin' for feathers or blood along his trail, that would prove whether or not he was usin' a bow or a gun. Snares, steel traps, nets, or deadfalls may tell another story.

"Should a river lie in th' outlaw's way, an' if he was used to the ways o' the woods, he'd probably make use of two dry sticks about as thick as a man's leg an' ten to twelve feet long. He'd lash 'em about fourteen inches apart by means o' two traverse bars an' green willow bark. Then, gettin' in between the logs, he'd rest his arms over them, an' with his legs he'd paddle his way across the river. Even a good swimmer'll make use o' such a raft, as it helps him keep his gun an' ammunition or bow an' arrows dry. Or he may lash on a little platform o' sticks to keep his clothes above water.

“If th’ outlaw’s an Indian, he’ll do what a white man wouldn’t, an’ that is, that while th’ Indian’s indifferent about the place from where he starts, he’s very particular about the place he’ll land, th’ opposite bein’ true of a white man. The Indian doesn’t worry about where he gets in, but where he gets out, an’ thus he avoids makin’ a bad landin’ by avoidin’ mud, matted over-hanging’ branches, or slippery rock. Another thing th’ Indian outlaw will try to do is to land either on hard ground, slopin’ rock, a fallen tree, or stranded driftwood, so that he can gain the shelter o’ the woods without leavin’ many signs o’ his landin’. Th’ outlaw’d also be careful, as soon as his feet touched bottom, to shove his logs out into the current, so that they’d be carried away an’ leave no sign of his raft.

“But to an experienced Indian trailer even a tiny sign’s enough. A white trailer always looks for a continuous trail, while an Indian trailer’s often satisfied with but a single sign. Then he’ll enter the bush an’ circle widely in the hope o’ pickin’ up the trail farther on, as he’d be sure th’ outlaw’d try to fool him as to where he entered the woods, an’ to look for that place’d be but a waste o’ time. Thus th’ outlaw’d waste time by tryin’ to fool the trailer, an’ the trailer’d gain time by circlin’ an’ pickin’ up th’ outlaw’s trail farther on. If th’ outlaw has to hunt his own food, then he’ll have a hard time to cover the signs, which the trailer’ll easily read. Then by followin’ at his utmost speed the trailer’ll either force the outlaw to travel without food, or make him easy to capture.

“Trailin’ in summer’s hard work, for then, if th’ outlaw’s a good woodsman, he stands about nine

chances to one o' gettin' away. In summer trailin', when the trailer's searchin' for a trail, he doesn't look down near his feet, but from ten to twenty feet ahead. If searchin' on risin' moss-covered rock, he looks from twenty to fifty feet ahead. If searchin' in an open, grass-covered country, he may sight the trail on a hill-side half a mile away, an' miles farther away if th' outlaw traveled in a wagon. A trail leadin' over moss-covered rock'll grow out in a week's time, but if over soft ground it'll remain much longer.

"One thing that makes summer trailin' much more difficult than winter trailin' is the care that must be taken to avoid makin' a noise by breakin' dead branches or steppin' on dead wood. An' for that reason th' old trailers an' hunters at that season o' the year would wear nothin' but a pair o' moccasins an' their breech-cloth. So they'd lessen the chance o' their clothin' catchin' on dead wood an' makin' a loud, breakin' sound. Even to-day some o' the Hudson's Bay Posts still sell for that purpose breech-cloths made o' red, white, or blue 'strouds'; they're seven inches wide an' from thirty to thirty-six inches long. An' by the way, even to-day th' trailers often rub their naked bodies with 'old wives' grass,' especially when trailin' big game. It's a thin, scraggly grass that grows in bunches something like blue bunch grass, an't has a very pungent sweet smell that prevents th' animals from scentin' the Indian's body smell. Though wild animals don't much mind the smell of Indians, they simply detest the smell o' white men. An' for that matter, Indians hate it too, an' when they want to roast a filthy tribesman, they'll declare that he smells almost as bad as a

white man. But while th' Indian hunter's an expert at trailin' animals, when it comes to trailin' men he's sometimes surpassed by the work of Indian women. The reason's clear. Indian men are used to trailin' game. Indian women are used to trailin' men."

My mental picture of Indian maidens pursuing Indian braves amused me.

"Why do you smile, my son, when what I say's nothin' but the truth? Th' Indian hunter's used to pursuin' game, an' when he kills it, his work's done. So he goes home an' tells his wife an' daughters where they'll find the dead game. Their work is to bring it in. They back-track the hunter's trail until they come to the carcass, then they skin it an' dress it an' carry it home. In that way they're constantly followin' the tracks o' men, an' consequently, from long experience, they often become more expert at trailin' men than the men are themselves. In fact, Indian boys are trained from childhood to follow the tracks o' game, an' Indian girls are trained from childhood to follow the tracks o' men.

"If an Indian realized—— But you boys ought to be asleep. For we've got to be up an' on the way long before daylight, and——"

"But, Bill, I don't think I'll sleep. I'm so excited—— anyway, tell us a little more, then I'll turn in," coaxed Lincoln.

"Well, only just a word or two, for I was goin' to say: If an outlaw realized that he was bein' followed by a greenhorn he might, without goin' near the trunk of a tree, use a crooked stick to haul himself off his trail an' up to a branch overhead. Then he'd count on travelin' from one tree to another by way o' their

branches for a considerable distance in order to baffle his pursuer. But that wouldn't work with an experienced Mounted Policeman or an Indian or half-breed trailer. Because, when they'd come to th' end of the outlaw's trail, they'd simply circle an' keep on circlin', each time coverin' a greater circle, until they again picked up the trail.

"The best chance an outlaw has o' throwin' the trailer off his trail is to enter water. But a greenhorn outlaw might wade in in th' opposite direction from what he counted on travelin', an' th' experienced trailer, knowin' that old bluff, would work in th' opposite direction too an' nab his man. One thing the trailer'd soon learn would be whether or not th' outlaw had used poles in enterin' the water, as that'd prove th' outlaw's ability as a swimmer. It'd also tell whether or not he had a gun. Because even if he had a gun, he couldn't shoot if he took to swimmin'. Therefore, if he counted on shootin', he'd have to content himself with wadin', unless while swimmin' he carried his gun on a raft. If, however, th' outlaw dives into a river or lake, the trailer's at a great disadvantage. For he has to do a heap o' guessin' an' travelin' too before he runs any chance o' pickin' up the trail along the shore. But, my boys, it's gettin' late an' we best be turnin' in."

"Thanks, Bill. Summer trailing is certainly interesting, but isn't there a lot to learn about winter trailing?" asked Lincoln.

"There certainly is, my boy, for besides ordinary winter trailin', there's one way o' trailin' both animals an' men that you've never read of in any book. But it's too late now, so good-night, my sons."

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAY OF THE NORTH

BENEATH a clear, cold sky we turned in, and I slept so soundly that Bill had to shake me awake for breakfast. Though it was several hours before dawn, the sky was strangely illuminated, and a spirit of awe soon possessed me.

“My boys, if you walk out toward the bay, you’ll see the sky completely covered with a wonderful display o’ Northern Lights. Perhaps before we get under way we’ll hear, as I heard a little while ago, that strange swishin’ an’ hissin’ an’ crackin’ sound the Northern Lights sometimes make.”

The meal over, we banked our fire. Then each swung a little pack upon his back, slipped his feet into his snowshoe thongs, raised his hood, slung his quiver over his shoulder, pulled on his double deerskin mittens, and strode silently out upon the bay, heading eastward along yesterday’s trail. It was then we witnessed the Northern Lights in all their amazing splendor. Great waves of light were flashing from near the northern horizon right up to the zenith in about one second’s time. As they varied in width, they produced different sounds, the wide waves making a rustling noise, while the narrow waves rendered a sort of crackling sound. At times, too, the sounds resembled the swishing back

and forth of a long-lashed whip, but at that precise moment we heard no crackling sound.

The whole of the sky's great dome was a vibrating mass of splendor, rising from the northern horizon and broadcasting its enchanting waves so far beyond east and west and zenith, too, that they actually met over the southern horizon. The power of its amazing light lit up the snow as if several moons were shining, and though it was still night, we could see for many miles.

"Bill, what makes those waves of light flash and flare that way?" Lincoln asked.

"My boy, many people, both white an' red, have been doin' a heap o' guessin' about it for the last few thousand years, an' though they've given it many a fine name, no one's any the wiser. Th' Indians call it 'The Dance o' the Dead Men.'

"Lincoln, my boy, you're not used to snowshoein', an' as the trail's already broken, you better lead the way an' set the pace. But keep in mind we've got to catch those Indians soon," remarked the old hunter.

With powdery snow flying above our dragging heels, we crossed a muskeg, then through woods and over a hill, descending into the valley where lay the trail we had discovered yesterday. Mile after mile we followed it, Link and I for a while taking turns at setting the pace, until caution warned the old hunter to take the lead. Then nothing was said above a whisper. About five o'clock that morning the Aurora Borealis faded, and as it was still several hours from daylight, the shadow of night again enveloped the forest. But even without the Northern Lights, moon, or stars, the northern winter night is never in total darkness. A certain

amount of light always falls from the sky, and to a certain extent is reflected back again by the snow. Thus night travel upon river and lake is common practice. When we halted for a short rest Bill said:

“My boys, this appears to be a fresh trail, but remember that on a still day a trail, though six or eight hours old, may have th’ appearance o’ bein’ freshly made. Yet in many cases you can learn its age by the hardness o’ the snow; for conditions bein’ equal, the fresher the track, the softer the trail.”

“Bill, I’ve been wondering if an outlaw tried to fool you by wearing his snowshoes reversed—that is, with the heels in front—could you detect the fraud by examining his trail?” I asked.

“That trick’s often been tried, my boy, an’ while if well done it might fool a greenhorn, it wouldn’t fool an old Mounted Policeman, or the kind o’ natives the Police employ as trailers. An’ I’ll tell you why. If an outlaw reversed his snowshoes, the snowshoe prints would prove the deception in several ways. For instance, th’ edges o’ the prints o’ the toe an’ heel would slant the wrong way. The prints wouldn’t show the draggin’ o’ the heels, an’ might show the draggin’ o’ the toes. Also the greatest pressure o’ the tread, that is at the ball o’ the foot, would fall in the wrong place on the shoe, an’ prove it, too, by the print in the snow. Besides, the man’s stride would be shorter an’ more uneven, an’ the toe o’ the snowshoe would sink deeper than the heel, exactly opposite to what happens when the shoe’s properly worn.”

Now the trail led over hill and dale, rocky ridges and swampy places, as well as through heavy timber, and



The meal over, we banked our fire. Then each swung a little pack upon his back, slipped his feet into his snow-shoe thongs, raised his hood, slung his quiver over his shoulder, pulled on his double deerskin mittens, and strode silently out upon the bay, heading eastward along yesterday's trail. It was then we witnessed the Northern Lights in all their amazing splendor.

whenever it lay in the right direction it followed little streams that emptied into little lakes, the kind so often found in that well-watered country. Finally, as we were passing through fairly heavy timber, Bill, who was still leading the way, stopped suddenly and silently pointed to a place in the snow where the tracks indicated that two men had halted for a moment. At first the tracks paralleled each other, as when men walk and talk together; then they toed out as when men look about; finally they led away in single file. Apparently the Indians wanted to camp for the night but were not satisfied with the site.

“When trailin’, always use caution, my boys. Always make sure you see your quarry before your quarry sees you. In this case, however, we’re followin’ friends; yet we’d better make sure before they even suspect our presence.”

Again we moved forward, but now Bill, more than ever alert, was constantly watching for signs. After traversing several hundred yards, he suddenly halted again, and peering ahead for a while, motioned us to look in the direction he pointed. Though the light of dawn was growing stronger we could see nothing unusual, and Bill, realizing this, pointed again at a spot about thirty paces away, then whispered:

“See that green branch on the snow? What’s that mean to you?” And as we silently gazed at it he added: “A freshly cut tree. We’ll probably find their camp just ahead. But to see them before they see us we must move without a sound. I better go ahead alone. You boys keep back as far as you can without losin’ sight o’ me. Remember, be as silent as the dead.”

Avoiding brush and branch, the old trailer slowly and silently advanced, and not until he had almost vanished from view did we follow him. As we now moved along I noticed where an evergreen had been felled and stripped of its branches, probably to form a bed. Farther on a big dead tree had been chopped and dragged away, no doubt for firewood. Bill now stood still, intently watching something, so we too halted. Presently he moved again, and then in a cheery tone I heard him call:

"Quay, quay!"

A moment later a voice answered:

"Quay!"

Then another added:

"Quay! quay!"

Bill now beckoned to us, and as we approached I could hear the old hunter being heartily welcomed in Indian dialect. When we hove in sight of their camp we recognized two of the Indians from the crew of the freight canoe. We were greeted with friendly smiles and hearty handshakes. Neither of the Indians could speak English. But they seemed glad to see us and beamed on us for a while, and I remember how happy it made me but how strange the new voices sounded.

They had been asleep when Bill arrived, and now they hastened to renew their fire; so in a little while we boys were smiling over a second breakfast. Meanwhile the three men talked excitedly in Cree, so Link and I gained no knowledge of what was said until the old hunter turned to inform us:

"My boys, our friends are in a hurry to get away. Be patient an' I'll tell you everythin' as soon as they leave.

They want to reach the nearest tradin' post without delay, so an express can be despatched to the nearest Mounted Police Detachment. They're in hopes the Police can catch the bandits before they get out o' the country."

Though the two Indians possessed no firearms, I noticed with envy that they owned an ax and each had a steel-bladed knife.

Breakfast over, the Indians slipped their feet into their snowshoe thongs, donned their packs, then, shaking hands all round, they bade us good-bye and away they went southward. Sitting beside their fire, old Bill told us what he had learned:

"Yes, my boys, it was O'Brien an' his devilish crew that sent our canoe to destruction, shot th' other three Indians, an' took these two prisoners to help man the freight canoe. An' O'Brien put these two lads ashore on a barren island in Golden Lake, miles away from the mine, an' left 'em there until he an' his gang returned with the gold. An' havin' no means of escape, th' Indians had to stay there until they were picked up.

"Th' Indians said th' only reason O'Brien let 'em live was to make 'em help paddle an' portage the heavy cargo, an' th' Indians, suspectin' the brutes would murder 'em before they reached the next tradin' post, made good their escape. They did it by laggin' behind on a portage, seizin' an ax an' a couple o' packs o' grub, an' then hurriedly lashin' together a couple o' logs, on which they fled down river. Roundin' a turn, they crossed to the northern bank. Unlashin' an' settin' adrift their raft, they made their way ashore over stones that left no trail. Then they hid in the dense woods for a

couple o' days before they attempted to follow the shore up river again. They said that since their escape they had to do all their travelin' on foot."

"But how did O'Brien and his gang get the gold? Did they kill the men at the mine?" Lincoln asked.

"Th' Indians didn't know," the old hunter replied.

"But, Bill, why didn't we go with the Indians now?" I inquired.

"Because they want to travel as fast as they can, an' you boys have had so little practice on snowshoes they'd leave you far behind. Besides, I don't like the direction they're takin'. I believe we should head west along the lake shore for a while in the hope o' findin' an incomin' river, up which we can travel in the right direction. One day when O'Brien an' Perkins were lookin' at the map I heard 'em discussin' a fairly large river that entered the lake somewhere west o' here. That river's still west of us, an' that's what I'm goin' to hunt for. If we keep headin' west along this south shore we'll find it sure. Then, if we follow it, we'll find easier travelin'. Remember, my boys, whenever possible, follow the line o' least resistance. It's often not only the easiest way, but the fastest route. It's often easier to walk two miles on a frozen river than one mile through the bush.

"Another thing th' Indians told me was that they believed the outlaws had lost their canoe, as the lads discovered signs that the gang had been trackin' a raft an' that when they reached the big lake they must've done a lot o' sailin', as they saw no sign o' their landin' on the southeastern shore. But I guess they've landed west of our bay, or perhaps even tracked up the very

river I'm lookin' for. It would cut a good deal off their overland journey. But, anyway, they'd have to wait for the freeze-up an' tackle it with sleds an' snowshoes. That would hold 'em up for a few weeks. Then, too, the thieves would have to cache the gold. They couldn't haul all of it on sleds.

"I tried to persuade the lads to travel west with us in the hope we might waylay the gang, but the thought of three unarmed men an' two boys tacklin' six armed outlaws who would shoot on sight didn't appeal to them. However, I've made up my mind if I get half a chance I'm goin' to help the Police run those brutes down."

"But, Bill, it may have snowed a foot since they made their trail, so how on earth do you expect to find it, let alone follow it?" I asked.

"True, my boy, but an experienced tracker can often find an' follow an unseen trail for miles, even though the track may be covered with a foot or so o' snow. An' do it, too, even though it's impossible to see any sign o' the trail. An' maybe I'll get a chance to prove it to you. So now, boys, let's get back to camp. We must start early to-morrow mornin'."

That afternoon while Bill was packing up, he requested us to make a round of the trapping trail to gather whatever was caught and to spring all snares and deadfalls so that no more animals would be killed.

Next morning at breakfast the old hunter cautioned us to drink all we wanted, as we would not get any more water until we either drilled a hole through the ice or made a fire to melt snow. He also warned us not to eat snow, as it was an unwise way to try to slake thirst.

The meal over and everything securely laced upon our

toboggans, we started on our overland journey with old Bill leading the way and breaking the trail. Our sleds were fairly well loaded, and contrary to Northern custom, Bill, who was acting as track beater, was hauling the heaviest load. It is the custom of the country that if three men undertake to haul three hundred pounds of freight on toboggans over an unbroken trail, the first—the track beater—would haul only fifty pounds, the second, one hundred pounds, and the third, one hundred and fifty pounds. Thus trippers claim the difference in trail and the difference in weight result in each man assuming an equal share of the work.

Our sleds were loaded with dried meat, fowl, fish, and fruit, hairy caribou robes and hairless caribou skins, extra clothing, also leather and sinews for both mending and snaring, materials for fire making, as well as our bows, arrows, and spears. We made a picturesque little party in our hairy home-made clothing as we trailed in single file across the bay and turned westward along the southern shore of the big lake. But though we kept far enough out to clear the points, we kept close enough in to observe the mouth of any river we might pass.

Sometime later, while about to round a point and while we were still screened by a few bushes, we discovered a lynx in pursuit of a rabbit. The lynx had evidently driven the little creature into the open to lessen its chances of escape and was now gaining rapidly upon its quarry. But just when we expected the lynx to seize its prey, the big beast leaped clean over the rabbit, which instantly dodged and bolted away at a right angle. Again and again the lynx repeated the manœuvre.

"How strangely the big brute acts," remarked Lincoln.

"My boy, the lynx is playin' with the rabbit, just as a cat plays with a mouse before it eventually kills it."

Then, as Bill strung his bow, the lynx struck the rabbit with its forepaw and knocked it into the air. A moment later an arrow sped past the lynx and buried itself in the snow. The surprised beast suddenly whirled and stood gazing at the little hole in which the arrow had disappeared. That gave the old hunter the chance he needed. The second arrow went true, and while the lynx hissed and snarled as it fought the broken shaft protruding from its shoulder, the hunter sent flying a third arrow and killed it. After removing the skin, we cooked some lynx meat for dinner. In taste it somewhat resembled both rabbit and veal. With his knife bound to a shaft, Bill dug a hole in the ice, so we had water to drink.

A little before dusk Bill chose a camp site, and each using a snowshoe as a shovel, we cleared away the snow. While the old hunter started a fire, Link and I erected a lean-to frame and over it stretched some deerskins. Then a brush mattress was laid, not only for our bed, but also to keep our moccasins dry while attending the fire. Soon after dusk it began to snow, and though it fell upon the lower part of our bed, we spent a fairly comfortable night.

Before sunrise we were again on the march, and had covered not more than three or four miles before Bill thought he saw the mouth of a river at the southern end of a deep bay. So we headed south to investigate. True enough we found a river there and traveled up it

until nearly noon when we came upon a band of caribou feeding and sunning themselves in a muskeg covering about a hundred acres. It was dotted here and there with scraggy jack pines, balsam poplars, clumps of willows, and tussocks of wiry grass that showed above the snow.

Bill explained that they were woodland caribou, larger than those of the Barren Grounds, and as the name implies, year-long denizens of the woods. Though migratory, too, they seldom wander far, usually roaming in bands few in numbers. Some were feeding, others were lying down; fawns were scampering about in play, and young bulls were sparring at each other with prong-like horns. There must have been about fifty in all. We watched them for a while before a few of the young bucks discovered us; then they stopped their fencing and came down wind to investigate the three strange creatures clothed in caribou skins.

With heads held high and expanding nostrils quivering in readiness to catch scent of danger, they came on very slowly, yet not without a great deal of high stepping and prancing. Every now and then they threw their heads down and up, and then held them rigid again. They were brave enough to come within sixty or seventy yards. Suddenly they caught our scent, fell back almost upon their haunches, wheeled round, and fled in alarm to the band. The whole herd began leaping into the air with tails up, then sweeping away at full gallop they entered the woods beyond and disappeared.

"It's too bad they scented us," Bill exclaimed. "Now they may gallop miles before settlin' into a trot.

If they'd merely sighted us they'd only gallop a few hundred yards, trot a mile or two, an' then begin feedin' again."

"A fine sight though, wasn't it?" I remarked. "But, Bill, how do woodland caribou differ from the Barren Ground kind?"

"My boy, I'll tell you some other time, as we better be movin' along while the sun's up."

So off we started again, but we had not gone a hundred yards before Link called out:

"Bill, why don't you let Gord or me take our turn at breaking the trail?"

"Because, my son, your load's heavy enough for you, even on a packed trail, an' anyway, track beatin's dangerous work. You might at any moment fall through th' ice."

"Why, how could we? We're much lighter than you!" I exclaimed.

"Weight isn't half as dangerous as ignorance. It's lack of experience that creates the risk. At some places on this river there's likely to be little rapids where th' ice is sure to be thin enough to let us through, but the surface snow may show no sign of it. You can't rely on the look o' the snow. A tripper must be constantly suspicious of the strength of the current, for in certain places the current controls the thickness of th' ice. Besides, there may be 'slushes' an' air holes, too."

"Then what should we do if we come to a place where there might be rapids, though the surface snow gave no sign of it?" Link asked.

"Always go ashore, my boy, then you'll run no risk."

As we proceeded we heard the hoarse *cr-r-r-cruck*,

cr-r-r-cruck of ravens and saw a number flying by. They appeared about twice the size of crows.

"Ravens live down North all the year round," old Bill told us. "But 'barkin' crows' go up South for the winter."

It was another of those charming winter days of brilliant sunshine that are so often experienced in the Northern Forest; yet there was just enough powdery rime falling to form a delicate haze that enveloped and softened the distant landscape in a delightful way.

That afternoon, before we boys could see any sign of danger, the old hunter left the river and broke the trail among the trees along the bank, because, as he explained, we were approaching dangerous rapids and he suspected treacherous ice below the snow. When we questioned him, he further explained that below the big oval patches we saw, where the surface of the snow appeared in the form of slightly shallow depressions, the ice, on account of the swiftness of the current, had only recently formed, just long enough ago to catch the last few falls of snow. Consequently, the ice would be so thin it might not support us.

Farther along he pointed to a little dark-blue patch of open water where foam squirmed and leaped as it suddenly rushed out from beneath the ice, dashed across the opening in that brilliant sunlit snow, and as suddenly disappeared from view. Finally we came to where there was much more open water, of a far more violent order, and there, on the shore at a place that appeared as if it had been used as a portage, we found freshly felled trees and newly chopped logs.

Shoveling about with one of his snowshoes, the old

man found beneath the snow two brush mattresses where a number of men had been sleeping beneath tents—the tent pegs were still standing. The whole aspect of the snow-covered remains of the camp indicated that a month or more must have passed since it had been used. Above the rapids, which were about a quarter of a mile in length, Bill also found signs of where timber had been cut, evidently to build a large raft.

It was there we spent the night, and after supper Bill told us what he thought of the man signs he had seen that afternoon. He was now sure he was on the trail of O'Brien and his gang, and he believed they had been traveling up that river with a raft. If that was true, then he knew that the freeze-up would either force them to spend the winter on the bank of that stream in order to guard the treasure, or they would have to cache part of it somewhere near before they could haul the rest across country. The total weight would be much more than they could manage, as the bulk of their necessary winter outfit would crowd most of their treasure off their sleds.

“Now, boys, if we find the place where they’ve stopped travelin’ by raft, I’m certain I’ll find where they left the bulk o’ the treasure. Then, if I find their cache, I’ll also find their outgoin’ trail; an’ when I find that, I’ll simply follow well behind ’em until they reach some tradin’ post. Then we’ll get men that’ll help capture the whole rotten outfit. So remember, boys, I’m countin’ on each o’ you playin’ a man’s part. Tomorrow keep your eyes open, watch the shores for any indication of a raft or another campin’ place or signs of a trail. But the next sign we’ll most likely see will be

farther up the river where we'll encounter another rapids."

That night Link and I were so excited over the idea of taking part in the capture of the outlaws that we found it hard to sleep, and many a time we whispered to each other as we lay awake.

The following day, though the upper course of the stream was steadily growing smaller and more over-shadowed with dense timber, nothing of importance was discovered. Of course, moose, caribou, wolf, and lynx tracks crossed our way, as well as many footprints of smaller game, but we were now all eyes for signs of much more dangerous quarry. We were man-hunting now, and, furthermore, hunting the vilest kind of men.

Next morning, however, we had not traveled three miles before we entered a wild, rocky little ravine where the river's turbulent waters could still be seen in a series of plunging cascades that banished all thought of further navigation by canoe or raft. Judging from the hills that stood beyond, the old hunter concluded that those rapids marked the end of O'Brien's travel by raft. Sure enough that proved to be true, for not only did Bill find the forsaken raft beneath the snow, but he could discover no sign of another raft having been built above the rapids. Besides, he also found where the outlaws had camped for several days.

Old Bill told us that if he cared to take the trouble he could make quite an accurate guess as to the number of days the outlaws had remained by merely counting the felled trees in order to arrive at the amount of wood the fires had consumed, and also by comparing that with the other signs he had read. Yet, not being satis-

fied with what he had found about the old camp, he began circling the place, at first within a radius of about a hundred feet, then about a hundred yards, until at last he must have been working within a radius of about a quarter of a mile.

He spent the best part of a day at the work, but in the end had to acknowledge he had found no sign of a cache or of a trail leading to one. He claimed that if they had cached the sacks of gold anywhere near that camp, the snow at that time must have been so thin there was no chance of picking up the trail or of finding the cache near the camp—at least, not until next spring.

“My boys,” said old Bill, as we were resting comfortably in the glow of the fire that night, “if the lay o’ the land will tell me which way they’ve traveled from here, I’ve no doubt whatever I can find an’ follow their trail. For, as you’ll remember, the deepest single fall o’ snow fell within two consecutive days. Now, even if it falls to a depth of a foot an’ a half more, I’ll still be able to follow their invisible trail once I pick it up. Once I stand over it, no matter whether I can see it or not, I’ll never lose their trail again. Then I’ll have ’em sure. Then they’ll never escape . . . unless they kill me.”

CHAPTER XV

THE MURDERERS' INVISIBLE TRAIL

DURING the night the temperature seemed to have dropped to around twenty below zero. In the morning, when the sun caught the mist rising from the open rapids, it suggested golden smoke amid a winter forest in Fairyland. Making good headway up the river valley, we came upon two more camp sites where at each O'Brien and his gang had spent but a single night. At least, that was what the old hunter said, and he further added that from the signs he read their sleds must have been so heavily loaded that they could not travel more than a single mile to our three or four.

Farther on we caught sight of a wolverine crossing the little sunlit valley about fifty yards ahead of us, and though it saw us, too, it did not hurry. Apparently it was not in the least afraid of us. It walked with a roll and a good deal of swagger. When we came upon its tracks we noticed they were very similar to those of a small bear. The claw marks were long and very pronounced. For its size its steps were quite short. Sitting down on our sleds beside the tracks, we rested awhile in the sun.

"Bill, you promised to tell us about wolverines," Link reminded him.

"I wish you would," I chimed in.

“So you want to hear about *War-sa-ka-tchak*—the Mischief Maker; for that’s what th’ Indians often call him. The wolverine’s much mixed up in Indian folklore—especially when the teller of tales leaps about the campfire, chantin’ an’ pantomimin’ his story of the most destructive animal in all the Northland. Yes, he’s a great mischief maker, an’ in that way he’s in a class by himself.

“As you’ve seen, he looks somethin’ like a little bear. In fact, he’s often called a skunk bear, an’ there’s a reason: he frequently emits a strong smell somewhat after the manner of the skunk. In many ways he’s different from other forest creatures, an’ it seems to me he’s endowed with more brains. But he doesn’t often make use of ’em in a nice way.

“The color an’ quality of the wolverine’s fur varies accordin’ to the locality in which he lives. When livin’ in the Strong Woods Country, especially the part north o’ Lake Superior, or in British Columbia, where the timber’s extra thick an’ heavy, the wolverine’s coat is much softer an’ thicker in texture an’ darker an’ richer in color, the reason bein’ better food an’ better shelter. But when livin’ on the prairies or the Barren Grounds, his coat’s much coarser in texture an’ lighter in color, bein’ caused, no doubt, by the lack o’ shelter from sun an’ storm, an’ the greater action required in securin’ food. In the Barren Grounds the wolverine has to keep up with the migratin’ caribou. But when driven to the extreme he’ll eat any food he can secure, whether it be flesh, fish, fowl, vegetable, or fruit. An’ he’ll try any kind o’ game from a moose to a mouse.

“Extremely bad weather, which so often depresses

other animals, seems to add to the wolverine's keenness of action. For while nearly all other animals seek shelter durin' storms, it's then he seems to enjoy huntin' most. No doubt it betters his chances o' securin' game. For then there's less chance of his quarry travelin'. Also it enables the short-legged brute more easily to overhaul his prey. An' it's then, owin' to fallin' branches, that there's less chance of his approach bein' overheard.

"While some other animals, as for instance the wolf, show much persistence in followin' a certain track, even when it happens to be crossed by other trails, no other beast can compare with the wolverine in the great determination it displays in keepin' to th' original trail. At such a time the wolverine's all eyes, ears, an' nose for the trail he started to follow. He'll follow it, too, for days, even though it may be crossed by a perfect maze of other tracks. Perhaps it's the fact that the wolverine's a poor traveler that makes him so persistent. His short legs hamper him in gettin' over the ground. But though he's slow, he has a sure way of overhaulin' his prey.

"When night overtakes him on the trail, he doesn't have to leave it to seek shelter the same as other animals do. He'll merely take a few turns round, like a dog, an' then lie down in his quarry's track. But of course he'll take care to lie down facin' his back trail, while he counts on his senses o' hearin' an' smellin' to guard against attack from the unknown part o' the track he's followin'."

"How does a wolverine attack its prey?" I asked.

"When a wolverine has eventually run down his



In the morning, when the sun caught the mist rising from the open rapids, it suggested golden smoke amid a winter forest in Fairyland. Making good headway up the river valley, we came upon two more camp sites where at each the Outlaws had spent but a single night. At least, that was what the old hunter said, and he further added that from the signs he read their sleds must have been so heavily loaded that they could not travel more than a single mile to our three or four.

quarry he'll not attack at once, but'll devote some time to spyin' about to size up the situation. If in a wooded country he'll try to choose in advance a certain tree that his quarry may pass under. Then he'll carefully work round in order to climb it an' lie upon one of its branches in readiness to drop upon th' unsuspectin' animal as it passes under. When attackin' from a tree a wolverine doesn't spring upon his quarry as a lynx would do, but simply drops upon his prey."

"But what would he do if there were no trees?" asked Link.

"My boy, when stalkin' game in an open country the wolverine'll wait until th' animal lies down an' goes to sleep. Then he'll approach up wind an' leap upon its back. Straddlin' his prey with his legs an' diggin' in his claws, he'll seize it by the back of its neck, just behind th' ears, an' chew away with all his might until his powerful jaws cut the spinal cord. Of course, the prey'll try to dislodge the wolverine. If in a wooded country, it'll dash beneath low branches o' trees in the hope o' knockin' its enemy off. You remember I told you a wolf leaps for the throat, but a wolverine tries for the spinal cord, an' when he takes hold, he hangs on an' chews with almost the same determination as a bulldog."

"But, Bill—how do you know?" I hesitantly asked.

"Gordon, my boy, why don't you make use of your power o' reasonin'. You city people never seem to use your brains when you enter the woods. How is it? Can't you understand that even if I, or any of my Indian friends, had never even witnessed such a sight, we could easily read it all from the signs we would see in the snow

or on the skin. Sometimes a hunter'll come upon a caribou that has been desperately wounded, an' when the hunter kills the deer, he learns the name of th' animal that made the attack. If it was a wolverine, the hunter sees where the brute dug his claws into the back o' the deer, an' where he chewed the back of its neck into a pulp. Then a little back trackin' on the caribou's trail will not only tell the hunter the middle but the beginnin' of the story. My sons, it's about time you both learnt how to read such happenings for your own enlightenment; but in order to do that you'll have to make use o' the brains God gave you. You'll have to do a little thinkin'. An' that reminds me of two things. life's taught me: hard drinkin' raises the devil, but hard thinkin' raises the man."

On the morning of the third day of our search for the trail, old Bill halted at a place where another story was printed in the snow.

"Now, my lads, look around an' tell me what you make of it," smiled the old hunter.

Several times we slowly turned about, and here and there we gazed both hard and long, but I saw nothing to read beyond a number of snow-capped stumps and several mounds of cut brush.

"Well, what's the news?" Bill chuckled.

"A lot of wood cut. Somebody must have stayed here quite a while," I replied.

"What's your verdict, Lincoln?" the old man asked.

"I guess the same as Gordon," answered Link.

"Now, I'm goin' to read you a real woodland story—a story you've never read before. Yet for thousands of years such stories have been printed, but never any-

where but in the snow. An' to read 'em, it takes a heap o' knowledge," smiled o'd Bill. "Now, if you boys'll go over there an' light a fire an' make yourselves comfortable, an' then about noon cook some grub an' call me when dinner's ready, I'll then read you a story. When grub's ready a shout or two won't hurt, for they're miles away by now."

While we boys went off to one side to cut brush, lay a mattress, and make fire, the old trailer got busy. Slipping off his snowshoes, he made use of one as a shovel, and began digging here and there in the deep, soft snow. In one place I could see he was uncovering a mattress of evergreen brush; in another place he dug out a few sticks of unburnt firewood; then he brought to view some half-burnt logs in an old fireplace beside which he left standing a few little sticks he had uncovered. Then he studied the brush mattress for a while, and even turned it up and looked underneath. After that he walked about among the tree stumps, knocking off their snow caps and examining their tops. He also scanned the brush piles. Then, putting on his snowshoes, he began circling the old camp site, at first working on a radius of about a hundred feet and next about a hundred yards, during much of which time he was lost to view.

When dinner was ready we waited awhile, but still he did not come; later, however, Lincoln shouted and the old hunter soon appeared. He was still all smiles.

"Well, boys, it's all hunkadory, so I'll read you the story as soon as I tuck in some grub." When our meal was over, he told us:

"Six white men were camped here for many days,

but they left several weeks ago. During their stay they lived under tents. They were waitin' for the freeze-up. They made six pairs o' bear-paw snowshoes, an' six toboggans, but they were mighty poor workmen. They also tried tannin' caribou hides for moccasins an' mittens an' snowshoe mesh an' thongs. They had firearms an' axes an' knives, as well as cookin' utensils. An' their axes each weighed three-an'-a-half pounds. When they left here they were haulin' very heavily loaded sleds. An' they were headin' south, an' makin' mighty poor time of it. At the rate they were goin' it looks to me as if they would have to cache the bulk o' their loads, or they'll be all winter gettin' anywheres. An' I guess we'll overhaul 'em without much trouble, because anyway they're mighty poor trippers. They don't know how to travel. But what can you expect?—they're from the city."

"You're still sure it's O'Brien and his gang?" Lincoln asked.

"Certainly; who else would they be? They're the ones we're after. An' we're goin' to overhaul 'em before many days. They can't shake us now. I've found their trail. It's——"

"But, Bill, where did you see it?" I asked.

"I didn't see it," replied the hunter.

"But you just said you found it," added Link.

"True. But I haven't seen it. I only felt it. An' you can feel it too. I'll take you there. But first I want to prove to you what I've read around here," said the trailer, as he got up and led the way.

"Any tripper ought to know how to read an old camp site. Now, to begin with, look at that bed. See those

three hollows? Three men bunked there. Here's where th' other three slept. Even a child could read that. The width o' mattress would also indicate how many men. The length o' bed from fireplace to wind-break would indicate whether they were whites or reds. In winter Indians draw up their legs more than white men do. An' see those rows o' standin' sticks? Tent pegs, my boys. See? To get the warmth of an open fire, they used two tents, facin' each other, lean-to fashion, with the fire between."

Turning up some brush he said: "See, there's no rime under this mattress. Now, if we were hot foot after 'em an' they were only a day ahead, the chances are there'd be rime underneath. That would indicate the bed had been used last night. An' to make sure we'd stick our hand in the ashes. If it felt hot, that would be another sign. And if they'd used the camp for several days the underneath ashes might remain warm for over forty hours. Another way to gauge their stay would be the number of trees cut. The amount of ashes would also tell the same tale. White men are usually neater about the fire than Indians. White men usually make one pile o' wood beside the fire, whereas Indians will throw it down anywhere near.

"Other signs to examine are the cuttings on the stumps. The Indian hunter usually carries a three-quarter or a one-pound ax; that is, a single-handed or 'trapper's ax,' an' it's more often carried in the belt. The white hunter usually carries a 'half ax'; that is, a two-handed ax, weighin' one-an'-a-half or two pounds. See? You can read from the stumps the size o' the ax. These stumps were cut with three-an'-a-half

pounders. Also the stumps would tell you exactly the quality of the choppers' skill as woodsmen.

"If you saw that fairly small trees had been felled by givin' 'em a few hacks on either side an' then by pushin' an' pullin' the tree back an' forth till it crashed, you'd be pretty safe in sayin' an Indian did the work. The white man usually fells a tree by choppin' it through, an' on account o' the size of his ax his tree would be larger than th' Indian's. The white man would cut his tree into regular lengths an' carry the sticks on his shoulder, while the chances are th' Indian wouldn't cut his tree into sticks but drag it full length to the fire. So from the stumps an' chips an' snow you can read what's taken place.

"See that smooth round-topped stump over there? That's where they were tryin' to tan deerskins. I'll bet they made a mess of it," said old Bill as he pointed that way.

"Then there's the difference of fires. While th' Indian gets up in the night to keep his fire goin' with small wood, the white man builds a big fire of larger wood, an' sleepin' through the night, he counts on the fire bein' out in the mornin'. In most cases that could be learned by the chips about the fire, or the lack of 'em, an' by the ax marks on a log where kindlin' had been cut in the mornin'. Th' Indian before goin' to sleep usually rakes all the embers together, to which he'll add a few handfuls o' dry twigs, which he'd break up fine an' then blow into flame, to cast a light while arrangin' his beddin' an' sayin' his prayers. The white man before turnin' in usually makes a big fire that leaves unburnt ends o' sticks an' more often he never says any,

prayers—especially if he comes from the city. Indians usually put the butt ends of their sticks in the fire with the thin ends stickin' out like the spokes of a wheel, while white men generally lay their wood parallel.

“Another thing, my boys, you ought to remember is that th' Indian usually hangs his tea-pail on a pole, leanin' it over the fire with the thin end of the stick shoved into the ground or snow. The white man puts his tea pail on a burnin' log an' often smokes his tea water, which th' Indian seldom does. Also the white man fills his tea-pail with surface snow by plungin' his pail through the crust, whereas th' Indian, to fill his tea-pail, uses the lid to dig down deep where the snow is clean an' has become granulated ice. Thus th' Indian gets more water from his pailful o' snow. Even the size o' pails have their signs, for Indians generally use smaller ones—the old-time, round-edge, copper kind.

“Another sign that's well worth notin' is that an Indian takes off his snowshoes before he starts choppin' wood, an' he stands 'em in the snow well back from where the fire'll be, toes up an' thongs hangin' down, with th' upperside facin' the wind, in order that they may dry. But the white man sticks his snowshoes where the windbreak will be, where they'll probably gather snow, an' bein' near the fire, the heat may turn the snow into ice. In the mornin' the white man'll advertise his carelessness by holdin' his shoes over the fire to dry, an', likely as not, burnin' the *babiche*. There's another thing the white man does: he usually drives his ax into a log close to the fire an' leaves it there all night. Th' Indian shoves his little ax into the snow beside his bed, handle up an' blade away, so that if

more snow falls durin' the night, he'll know exactly where to find it in the dark, an' within easy reach, too.

"When campin' for the night, th' Indian stands his toboggan on end against a tree, so it'll dry in the breeze, but the white man usually turns his over on its side at the head of his bed with his brush windbreak leanin' over it, which certainly won't improve its runnin' next day. Because meltin' snow will drop on it an' make it wet in patches, besides causin' ice to form on it.

"My boys, should you find little standin' sticks between the bed an' the fire, you can conclude that white men used them upon which to dry their moccasins an' socks. A mighty good way to burn 'em, too. An Indian would be more cautious. He'd merely wave his duffel socks a few times before the fire an' then put 'em inside his shirt to let 'em dry by the heat of his body while he slept."

"What are duffel socks?" Lincoln asked.

"Just pieces o' blanket twelve by eighteen inches that are wrapped about the foot. They're easily dried an' keep free o' holes much longer. Burnin' socks or moccasins on a winter trip is a mighty serious business. It may cost a man a frozen foot. Now, my lads, don't expect to read a whole story from just one sign, but put 'em all together in a heap before you start readin' aloud. An' that's what I'm goin' to do now, so come along an' listen."

He led us about fifty yards from camp to where we came upon much trampled snow, where he had previously stopped in his circling.

"Now look among those trees ahead. Can you see any sign of a trail there?"

The snow was in perfectly natural formation. It gave no hint of ever having been disturbed. There was absolutely no sign whatever of a trail of any kind, and we told him so.

"That's right, my boys, no livin' man could see a trail there, but any old duffer, even if he had lost both eyes and had two wooden legs, could find a trail there. An' now I'll prove it."

From dead branches he broke off thirty or forty little sticks and divided them between us.

"Now, boys, you go ahead in that direction, but zigzag back an' forth from one side to th' other; an' every time your feet tell you the consistency of the snow has changed—that is, every time you feel it harder in one place than another—plant a stick there."

We followed his directions, and when we ran out of sticks, we turned and, looking back, saw a slightly curved line of sticks among the trees. Coming up to us the old hunter said:

"That's the trail th' outlaws followed. You've marked it well. Remember, my boys, followin' an invisible trail in the snow is much the same as if you came to a creek that you wanted to cross yet could see no way o' doin' it because you could see no bridge or log spannin' the stream. Yet if someone told you that, though the water was so muddy you couldn't see into it, if you felt around with your foot you could feel a flat-topped log beneath the surface, an' on which you could cross the stream, you'd get busy, wouldn't you? An' you'd cross right over. That would be exactly like followin' an invisible trail in the snow. Besides, in walkin' across the stream on the log you'd also know

that if you stepped off the log you'd go down deeper. So it is with the trail under the snow. Every time you boys stepped off this trail you sank deeper, didn't you?"

"Yes," we both agreed.

"So now you know how to find an' keep an invisible trail that no livin' soul can see but which even a blind man can follow. Another thing to remember is that a trailer can follow by the feel of the foot better by night than by day, because at night he concentrates more on what he feels than on what he sees. An' remember, too, that the moccasined foot's better than the hand in testin' whether a trail's made by beast or man."

"But, Bill, if Gordon and I were following an unseen track made by man, and if you were not here to help us, how could we tell whether the invisible trail was made by white men or Indians?"

"My sons, if you'll remember that what I'm goin' to tell you applies to th' average Indian an' th' average white man, an' also that there are always exceptions to the rule, you'll not go far astray. In the first place, when a trailer suspects an invisible trail, he circles the spot in the hope o' pickin' it up. Then on findin' th' unseen trail by steppin' on it, he would follow it in exactly the same way; an' of course he'd do it with his snowshoes on. But if by the feel of his foot he couldn't tell which way the track headed, he'd shove a hand down in the snow to feel the hard-packed snowshoe print lying beneath the surface. The hardest part of the footprint would, of course, lie nearest the toe. But if he was still in doubt he would uncover the print.

That would not only prove which way the track headed, but it would show the size an' shape of the shoe. For nearly every Indian tribe wears a different style o' snow-shoe.

"Another thing, if the trail wandered about as if its maker had been lookin' for something, the trailer would conclude it had been made by a hunter lookin' for game. But if the trail led fairly straight, he'd think the maker had a definite place in mind. Also remember that an unseen trail varies much in its depth below the surface. Where it may enter or leave a valley or river bed it may be deeply covered with drifted snow, or where it traverses a wind-swept region it may come to the surface. But whenever you lose a trail, always circle the spot with an ever-increasin' radius until you find it again.

"Now, my boys, look above your line o' sticks an' tell me what you see."

"Nothing—excepting that a few of the lower branches have lost the snow from their tips, while the tips of all the others are covered," replied Lincoln.

"Exactly. Now you're gettin' on. You're usin' your eyes. That's just what has happened. When the gang passed along they brushed against those limbs an' knocked the snow off the tips.

"A good trailer wouldn't travel five miles on an unseen trail without knowin' a lot about the man or men he was trailin'. If followin' an Indian hunter's trail, you'd notice how often he had turned to look behind. He would do it, not only to see if any game might be lookin' at him or followin' him, but also to see how the landscape appeared from that point o' view—especially the sky line. Otherwise he might have trouble in findin'

his way back again at night, if he followed a slightly different route. But that's a thing the white man seldom does. That's why he's so apt to get lost. There, now, my boys, I've told you somethin' about followin' an unseen trail, so let's be gettin' along."

On our way back to our toboggans the old man showed us where the outlaws had cut down birch trees for the making of their snowshoes and sleds. Resuming our southward journey, we traveled but a few miles before we passed three spots where they had stopped to melt snow and have a snack; and a few miles farther on we came to where they had spent a night. Though their trail could not be seen, it was not hard to follow by the feel of the foot. The old hunter even let us boys take turns at leading the way and breaking a new trail for our sleds on top of their track. When we stood beside their night camp site, old Bill remarked:

"They grabbed the gold, an' now the gold's goin' to grab them. My boys, life's nothin' but a series o' boomerangs. An' we throw 'em ourselves. If we throw a boomerang o' good, it swings round an' comes back to us as sure as fate. If we throw a boomerang of evil, it just swings round, too, an' comes right back an' hits us in th' neck. Remember—that's life, my boys. We throw th' boomerangs ourselves, an' they all come back to us again. The gold's not only makin' it easy for us to follow 'em, but now, nine chances to one, they'll never escape."

"What's the one?" I smiled.

"There's two, my boy. A crust too strong for my weight to break. Or a long, wind-blown lake with the snow packed too hard for us to follow by the feel of the

foot. But down here in the North a crust's not likely to form, an' anyway we could circle the wind-blown lake an' pick up the trail again. So you see their chances of escape are mighty slim," and the hunter chuckled.

That afternoon we came upon another of their night camps. How slowly they must have traveled Bill said it was caused by their overloaded sleds. But this time when the old trailer circled the camp site to pick up the outgoing track, he discovered two invisible trails. One led westward toward a range of hills, and the other followed the valley southward as usual.

"We'll tackle this one," he decided. And as he headed for the hills he smiled. "It feels mighty good to me."

But at about the distance of a mile it suddenly ended, and after much circling and some digging about with snowshoes and sharpened sticks we made a thrilling discovery. Beneath the ashes of a dead fireplace we found unfrozen crumbly earth, and digging down we came upon a cache of small deerskin bags. And when Bill opened some of them we saw that they were filled with nuggets of gold.

We camped right there for the night, and so excited were we that we could not sleep. We would lie down, cover up snugly, remain quiet for a while, then someone would turn over, sit up, or put a stick on the fire. Then we would all get up and start talking again. I remember I felt very happy, and every once in a while I would burst out laughing over anything or nothing at all. Lincoln seemed to be affected in the same way, and I guess old Bill was too, but he seldom gave any sign of that sort of thing. At last we boys lay down again.

"They told me at the Fort there was a Mounted Police patrol coming out this way," Lincoln remarked. "Wouldn't it be great if they overtook us in time? Gosh! How I hope they'll bag O'Brien!"

"Don't worry, my boy—the Police'll get 'em; they always do. It's just a matter o' time. So go to sleep."

An hour later the old man was still sitting beside the fire. Presently Lincoln said:

"Bill, I can't sleep either. May I sit up with you for a while?"

"Certainly, my boy. I guess it's that gold that's got us goin'."

CHAPTER XVI

THE DANCE OF THE DEAD MEN

SLEEP seemed so far away from me that I got up, too, and we all sat in silence until Lincoln said: "Bill, tell us more about wolverines."

"My boy, I don't know much more, but I'm glad to see how keen you are to learn all about life in the living forest," the old man smiled. "I believe you'll make a hunter some day. But where did I leave off?"

"You were telling about wolverines following wolves," Lincoln replied.

"That's right. I remember now," he mused, and then began:

"Th' only chance a wolverine has o' killin' a big animal is to leap on it when it's asleep or to drop on it when it passes beneath a tree. After killin' its quarry, the wolverine always starts eatin' the softest part first, an' that's the belly. Then, after a big feed he'll curl up near the carcass an' go to sleep. Later on, when he wishes to cut up th' carcass an' carry it away, he'll chew around the front legs, an' get 'em free an' drag 'em away, perhaps a hundred yards or more. Then he'll bury 'em in the snow. Next he'll tackle the hind legs an' bury them. But each part of his quarry he'll bury in a separate grave, over which he'll pack the snow an' leave an abominable smell that'll keep other animals

away. If the legs are too big for him to sever, he'll take off big chunks o' flesh an' bury 'em instead.

"The wolverine's a slow but strong swimmer, an' though for his height he's a very heavy animal, he can at will swim shoulder high, or muzzle low, just by inhalin' or exhalin'. When swimmin' low the wolverine can scarcely be seen at a little distance.

"Young wolverines are called cubs, not kittens, an' they number from two to six, an' are usually born in April. The father hunts food an' brings it to the den for the mother an' cubs, that is when the latter are very young. In a few days the cubs begin to crawl about an' they're delightful little things to watch. At first they're very timid an' very curious, too. When they come to the mouth of the den to peep out, they'll jump back with fear, should even a leaf be blown about. A little later on, when they've grown smarter an' stronger, they're charmin' little creatures, an' it's then they begin to romp an' play in a most amusin' way.

"Later still, when their teeth are growin' sharp like little awls, they try to bite everything they can, includin' their mother an' sisters an' brothers. When they're not wrestlin' with one another, they're climbin' all over the place, as their claws have now become strong an' sharp. They like to tackle a slantin' tree, up an' around the bare trunk of which they'll climb in spiral fashion. They're really very much like children in the way they romp about an' chase each other in a game that resembles tag. Often, child-like too, it ends in a scrap. My boys, I'm sure you'd sit for hours watchin' the little beggars play, an' you'd laugh at 'em too.

“But when their diet changes from milk to meat, they begin to follow their mother away from the den. Sometimes too, the little mischiefs wander away without her. Then if one strays from th’ others, he may climb a tree an’ wait an’ whine for his brothers an’ sisters to come an’ find him. Or perhaps they’ll all get lost together an’ all go into trees an’ wait for mother. My boys, I often wonder how a mother animal, or a mother bird, with anywhere from five to fifteen young ones, knows when all her children are at home. Can she count? Or has she a name for each of them? Or does she call the roll the same as teacher in school to make sure they’re all present? I often wonder.

“The real home o’ the wolverine’s in the Barren Grounds, where they travel in bands of from five to twenty. The Barren Grounds in summer time’s perhaps the richest country in the world for a natural supply o’ food. For there the lakes an’ rivers swarm with fish; in fact, some o’ the lakes without even an inlet or an outlet are fairly teemin’ with the choicest o’ fish. An’ what with all the various kinds of animals an’ birds that breed in that great garden o’ mosses an’ grasses an’ flowers, it affords the wolverine a splendid huntin’ ground.

“While the wolverine’s sight isn’t strong, an’ his hearin’ only fair, his sense of smell’s so keen that he can pick up a trail many days old. Though the wolverine’s such a short-legged, thick-set animal, he travels far in his huntin’. Forty or fifty miles means little to him, especially in the Barren Grounds, where he’s constantly followin’ musk-ox or caribou. But in the Strong Woods Country he becomes more local

in his habits. He's a great animal to cache his food, that is, buryin' it in either snow or earth for future use.

"Of all North American animals the wolverine's the most destructive, especially in destroyin' fur along a hunter's trappin' path. So naturally the hunter becomes the deadly enemy of the wolverine an' does everythin' he can to destroy the brute. When a wolverine's followed closely by a dog, a wolf, or a man, he'll take to a tree an' thus escape from the dog or the wolf, but not from the man.

"If he's followed closely on a lake or in open country where he cannot take refuge in a tree, he'll try to scrape away some o' the hard, wind-packed snow, so that he may crouch low an' not be seen. But when th' enemy approaches closer, the wolverine'll hunch himself like a bear an' get ready to spring or strike. He strikes a clawin' blow o' much force, an' as a last resort he'll turn over on his back an' make use of all four sets o' claws as well as his jaws. Remember, my boys, never go near a wolverine unless you're sure he's dead, as he shams death even better than a bear. An' now, my lads, it's time we really tried to sleep."

"Lincoln," said the old hunter next morning, "I've been thinkin' about the gold. It's too heavy for us to move, so we'll have to leave it. Your father can arrange with the Hudson's Bay Company to have it hauled out by dog team. So, if you say the word, I'll close the cache an' build a fire over it to cover the signs we would otherwise leave."

On returning to our old camp, we picked up the still invisible southbound trail and followed it toward the height of land. Its condition told the old hunter that

even yet the bandits' sleds were so heavily loaded that their speed of travel was greatly checked. During the next two days their trail was steadily nearing the surface of the snow, and at one of their camps, where a heavy snowstorm had overtaken them in the night, their outgoing trail for the first time now came out into full view. From there on, as no snow had since fallen or no wind had since blown, their trail remained in sight. And as we must have been following them at double or treble their speed, we came shortly after noon upon another of their night camping sites. The signs were now so fresh everything could be read with ease. It all lay as an open book before us.

"My boys, danger's steadily increasing; soon I must travel some distance ahead. But before leavin' you, I'll wait an' see how the trail looks when we stop to camp this afternoon."

All signs were now constantly growing fresher; and when we stopped to camp at dusk the old trailer told us he would travel several miles in advance of us tomorrow. We camped in a dense grove to lessen the chance of our fire being seen, and before we turned in, the old hunter spent some time instructing us as to how we should conduct ourselves the following day, and as to how we should read his trail while he was traveling in advance of us.

"My boys, should danger threaten, an' should I want to signal you to stop followin' me, I'll slant two sticks in the form of an X across my trail. Should I want you to hurry up, I'll blaze a tree twice with my knife. Should I want you to follow as fast as you can with caution, I'll blaze a tree three times. But should I want

you to throw caution to the wind an' follow at your utmost speed, I'll cut a long blaze an' tear it off. An' should I want you to stop an' camp at a certain place, I'll cross two sticks like an X over my track an' leave beside the trail an arrangement o' little standin' sticks all leanin' together like the poles of a tepee."

By noon of the following day we came upon the outlaws' last night's camp. There was rime beneath their beds, and the underlying ashes of their fireplace were still warm.

"To-night, my boys, I'm goin' to have a look at the brutes. Then we'll settle our future plans," smiled Bill.

On resuming our way the old trailer went ahead and was soon lost to view, but before we boys had covered another half mile, he was waiting for us, and again he was all smiles as he pointed:

"See those marks in the snow? One of 'em broke a snowshoe there."

Again the old hunter went ahead, and again we followed far behind him. About an hour before dusk two crossed sticks halted us, and beside the trail stood a lot of little sticks in the form of a tepee. Bill had backtracked to set them there. We could read that from his snowshoe prints. After a whispered consultation we set about making camp and gathering firewood, but we did not start a fire, as he had warned us not to make a fire before dark because of the smoke being visible for miles around. After shoveling away the snow, laying our brush bed, erecting our windbreak, and piling a stock of wood near at hand, we arranged our fire-making kit in readiness. Then, wrapped in our deerskin robes, we sat waiting for the coming of night.

When at last it did arrive we were soon warmed by a blazing fire and refreshed with water and food. Hours then crept slowly by, and when Lincoln got up to fix the fire he said:

"Isn't Bill Hill a wonderful old chap? Think of him creeping up to O'Brien and his gang, as they sit around their fire, and think of him doing it, too, when he's armed with nothing but a knife."

"Old Bill is certainly a brick! And I'll bet he helps the Police to bag the whole outfit," I added.

Suddenly out of the nearby shadows came a sound that filled me with fright. Yet it was only a human voice. And all it said was:

"Hello, Lincoln."

It came from a thick clump of young pines that stood about fifty feet away, quite near our back trail, but what frightened me most was that I had never heard that voice before.

Instantly leaping up we gazed upon a human face—a human head without a body. Yet it was coming straight for us. The face, however, began to smile. Presently it said:

"So this is your new friend, Gordon Douglas."

But speechless we remained.

Coming nearer the head began to assume a body, then a pair of legs. It was a man.

"Mighty glad to see you, boys," the tall stranger exclaimed, as he gave us each a hearty handshake.

"Well, Gordon," the newcomer smiled, "that was a pretty close call you had when the mother caribou dumped you in the river. As soon as old Bill returns I want to have a talk with him about O'Brien and his

bunch. I'll be back in a few minutes; I want to give Constable Evans a hand with the sleds."

"Oh, gee!—did you say 'Constable'?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, I'm Staff-Sergeant Wright of the Northwest Mounted Police."

"Lordy, what luck!" exclaimed Link, throwing up his arms and jumping about from sheer delight.

"You're mighty lucky boys to have fallen in with such a woodsman as old Bill Hill," replied the Sergeant as he turned away and was presently lost in shadow.

"Where did you meet him, Link?" I asked.

"Me? Never saw him before."

"But he called you by name."

"That doesn't make any difference. First I ever saw of him. Is he an old friend of yours?" Lincoln asked.

"Friend? He's new to me," I replied.

"Then how did he know us? And how did he know about the caribou dumping you in the river?" Link asked.

Filled with the pleasure of meeting friendly strangers after passing months without seeing a new face, and thrilling with the adventure of helping to catch the murderers, we piled more wood on our fire to welcome the Police.

Presently we heard the sliding and swishing of sleds and snowshoes, and soon both men were beside our fire. Throwing down his sled line, Constable Evans shook hands with us boys.

"You must've had a hard time doing everything with nothing but a knife," he remarked. "But then I've always heard old Bill's a wonder in the woods."

"Yes," added Sergeant Wright. "Think of the old boy running down a bunch of bandits and even finding the buried gold. It's just as——"

"Good-evening, Staff-Sergeant Wright," came another voice from out the dancing shadows. Instantly both policemen wheeled about and two holster flaps flew open. But it was only the voice of old Bill; and Link and I, calling out his name, greeted him with joy. And when the firelight caught his fine old face, all three men shook hands together.

"I've wanted to meet you for years," said Sergeant Wright. "You've done great work. I congratulate you. What luck did you have to-night?"

"Fine!—fine!" the old trailer beamed. "The brutes are all there—just over the hill, about three miles away—six of 'em—an' they must be snorin' by now. We better tackle 'em before dawn."

Getting out his tobacco, Sergeant Wright filled his pipe and handed it to Bill, whose smile was soon lost in a cloud of smoke. Then a tea-pail, being filled with snow, was hung over the fire and we were soon drinking tea with sugar in it.

The Police, having decided that the arrest was to be made at three o'clock in the morning, old Bill told us boys to turn in and sleep awhile. But we couldn't sleep. We were so excited we couldn't even sit still.

They now began to talk about the robbery of the mine, so I asked:

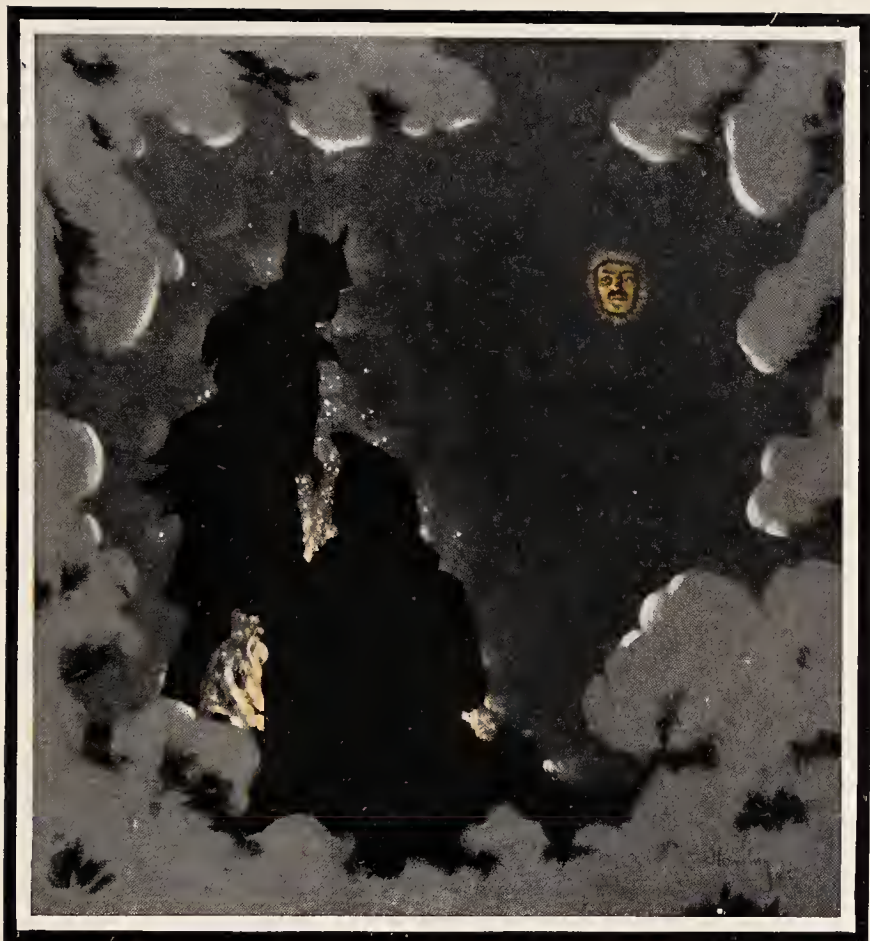
"Sergeant Wright, how did you and Constable Evans know our names? And how did you know about my being dumped in the river by a caribou? And how did you know all about Bill when you had never even

seen him before? And how did you know about O'Brien and his gang?"

"That's easy," the Staff-Sergeant laughed. "Our orders were to call at the mine on our way back from our northern patrol. So when we landed at the mine, we learned of the robbery. The prospectors told us that when O'Brien and five other white men arrived with the supplies and mail, they welcomed the strangers and showed them all over the place, even showing them where the sacks of nuggets were stored all ready for shipment. The claims, as you know, are on an island and are being worked by twelve men.

"The O'Brien crew made their camp for the night in the nearby bush. They aroused no suspicion, especially as they had brought the very supplies the miners had ordered and even a sack of mail for them. Besides, O'Brien had brought a small keg of brandy, a present from Mr. Lee to the foreman and his men. That evening they had a high old time. Letters from home and plenty of grog. So it wasn't long before the prospectors were all dead to the world.

"Then O'Brien and his crew collected all the miners' canoes and towed them several miles away to the mainland. Returning to the mine, they loaded all the sacked gold aboard their big canoe, and making good their escape from the island, they called at the mainland and set fire to the miners' canoes. Thus the bandits left the prospectors not only sound asleep but absolutely stranded on their island. When we arrived at the mine, the miners were building a canoe in which to send out two men to notify the Police. So, of course, we lost no time in getting after O'Brien.



Suddenly out of the near-by shadows came a sound that filled me with fright. Yet it was only a human voice. And all it said was:

"Hello, Lincoln!"

But what frightened me most was that I had never heard that voice before. Instantly leaping up we gazed upon a human face—a human head without a body. Yet it was coming straight for us.

"Though we were much delayed in trying to trace the gang, we had the good luck to find on one of the portages a lot of stuff they had thrown away when they were heading for the mine. It was mostly Perkins's property: dunnage bags and suitcases containing clothes, books, papers, cameras, films, and chemicals for developing and printing. Perkins's diary was also there. The last entry was made just before you started to run the rapids, and it mentioned the trouble the crew of the first canoe had made before they would make the run. That gave us a clue. We also developed the exposed films, and the prints told us much that we wanted to know.

"It was then that Evans and I saw the picture of you being hauled out of the river after the caribou had sunk your canoe, and it was from Perkins's diary that we learned that your canoe had been sunk by a mother caribou when you tried to kill her calf with an ax. In the same way we got our first glimpse of Bill Hill, though, of course, we had often heard of Bill and the work he had done in former years for the Police. Besides——"

"But," interrupted Lincoln, "one of the first remarks you made was about Bill being with us. How did you know he was the one man who had escaped death in the rapids?"

"I didn't know he was with you until I heard you boys say so. And even if I hadn't seen the photographs of you, it was easy to see who claimed your name when I said: 'Hello, Lincoln.' Besides, I'll recognize O'Brien the moment I see him from the snapshots you and Perkins took of him, and in the same way Evans and I will

know the rest of the gang. What with the photographs, the diary, and the facts we learned at the mine, it was easy to make a pretty good guess as to what had happened at the rapids—and as to the disappearance of the rest of your party.”

Then Bill and the Police began questioning each other, and one explanation followed another until Link and I began to nod. Presently I thought I would be more comfortable lying down. The next thing I knew Bill was calling me for breakfast. When I got up, I saw Sergeant Wright looking at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes after one. As I began eating, Link whispered to me:

“We’re going along, too. They’ve settled everything—just what each man is to do.”

Sleds packed and everything in readiness, Sergeant Wright handed his repeating rifle to old Bill. Turning to Lincoln and me the old trailer said:

“Now, my boys, follow me an’ I’ll tell you what to do when we near their fire.”

Off we started, each one hauling his own sled and old Bill leading the way. The air was very still, and as we crossed a small muskeg, I noticed a great flashing and flaring of the Aurora Borealis. Already old Bill had disappeared, as it was his intention to travel in advance of us in order to do a little scouting before we arrived. We were to wait for him on the top of the hill.

Though our toboggans were slipping easily and almost noiselessly—a sign of milder weather—it seemed to me as if we would never reach the hill. But perhaps that was due to my excitement. Eventually, however, we did reach there, and after a hard, slow climb with an

occasional rest, we gained the top. And there we found old Bill waiting for us. Already he had returned from a visit to the outlaws' camp.

"Everything's hunkadory," he whispered to the Police.

"Then let's leave our sleds here and get to work," replied Sergeant Wright.

"Remember, boys—not a sound," old Bill cautioned Link and me. "If you break a twig—we're done for."

Then in single file, slowly and carefully, we followed him down the trail, Bill with his rifle in hand and the Police with their holster flaps open. Even in the woods we could see fairly well because of the Northern Lights.

The sound of our swishing snowshoes, though scarcely to be heard, worried me. I felt sure the bandits would hear us coming. I wondered why Bill had not thought of that. I wanted to speak to Constable Evans about it. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I picked up a stick and in order not to step on his snowshoes, I reached forward and touched him with it. Looking round, he stopped. I whispered to him. It was all right. We were to take them off when Bill gave the sign. So on we went again. But I thought we would never get the signal. Though my body was sweating, my fingers were cold and I had to draw my thumbs out of their stalls and enclose them in my hands to try and warm them.

Presently the Police stopped. Bill was slipping his feet from his snowshoes. I could see the flickering of firelight on the upper branches of some trees ahead. We all slipped off our snowshoes. The Police now withdrew their revolvers from their holsters and the old

hunter slipped the cover off his rifle. Though I could not hear what Bill was whispering, I could see him pointing.

Then he went ahead as silently as if floating through space, and as the trail turned to the left, he soon disappeared. We waited. How quiet the woods seemed. But I could hear Lincoln breathing. It annoyed me until I remembered he was only two feet away from me. Seconds seemed to grow into minutes. I began to wonder what had happened to Bill. At last he returned. Again he and the Police whispered together. Again Bill pointed in three directions. Then Sergeant Wright and Constable Evans went ahead. Turning to us the old hunter whispered:

"You boys follow me until you come opposite to that clump o' pines, then stop following me and then move up to those trees. I'll go along farther, but you'll have a good view. They're just beyond those pines."

It must have taken us minutes to go a hundred feet. Now I could see firelight among the tree trunks. Presently the old hunter pointed to the pines and we boys took our cue and turned to our right. When we reached the spot, we found that while those trees formed a good screen for us, we had a clear view of the outlaws' camp.

Presently I saw Sergeant Wright come into view, and a moment later I also saw Constable Evans and old Bill. All were advancing on the camp from different angles, and holding their guns in readiness to fire. Walking straight up to the brush bed upon which slept six men, the Sergeant kicked one man's foot, and in a voice that was almost loud enough to wake the dead, he growled:

"Hands up—hands up!—or we'll fire!"

Instantly blankets and robes flicked into air and up shot a dozen hands above twelve scowling eyes.

"O'Brien, and you other five, I arrest you in the name of the Queen. You're charged with murder and robbery. Don't drop a hand or I'll fire! Get up—quick now! Line up over there—in line, I——"

But the Sergeant never finished his sentence. The foul-mouthed O'Brien was the last to rise, and in doing so, he suddenly dropped his hands as if to grab a gun that protruded from his bed. Instantly the Sergeant's revolver roared as a bullet grazed the bandit's face, and his hands flew up again.

"No monkey tricks, O'Brien, or you're a dead man!"

After that there was no more trouble.

Without turning his head or lowering his gun, the Sergeant then ordered Constable Evans to search the prisoners.

Then old Bill, without lowering his rifle, called to us boys to go back and bring down the sleds. And though we had to make three trips, we made short work of it, as it was all down hill. In the meantime, Constable Evans had finished searching the prisoners, their bedding, and their sleds for firearms and knives, all of which he had packed in the Sergeant's sled.

As everyone and everything was now in readiness, Staff-Sergeant Wright gave the word and away we marched on our long overland journey to Fort Vengeance. Old Bill was leading the way, Lincoln and I followed, then came the six prisoners all in Indian file, with the Police on guard behind.

While crossing a lake the old trailer halted the party to rest a spell. The Northern Lights were flashing so vividly they attracted the attention of all; and Lincoln whispered to old Bill as he gazed up at the sky:

“The Dance of the Dead Men!”

THE END

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